

Nonsensical

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Characters:

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by [Lovestruckay](#)

Summary

Shisui had been eight when his soulmark had finally appeared, scripted across his chest in a flowing feminine script. While he had been elated that he had been given a soulmate, the string of unintelligible nonsense now inked onto his chest had put a damper on the feeling.

Notes

And finally, my promised Shisui/Sakura fic! This chapter is dedicated to setting the stage for the story. This first chapter is dedicated to recreating the backstories of our favorite characters and rewriting their pasts to include the addition of soulmarks. The chapters that follow will be where the story truly begins. Rating will increase as story progresses! Enjoy!

Appearance

Chapter Notes

And finally, my promised Shisui/Sakura fic! This chapter is dedicated to setting the stage for the story and recreating the backstories of our favorite characters to include the addition of soulmarks. The rating of this story will increase as story progresses! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Shisui would always remember the day he had gotten his soulmark.

He was one of the many soulmates who were born without their mark. While this certainly wasn't an uncommon occurrence, it was one that always held an undertone of anxiety. After all, not everyone received a soulmark. Whether their soulmate died before they were born or whether they never existed at all, a great number of people were never given a mark.

With the entire world at war, there were more than just a handful of unmarked.

Ever since his father had explained to him how soulmarks and soulmates worked when Shisui was just a young boy of four, Shisui had fretted over whether or not he would also join the ranks of the unmarked. Every morning for four years, he would check to see if his mark had come. To check to see if the legends were true and if the spirit of his soulmate had snuck into his bedroom in the dead of night to paint their mark on his skin. And every morning, he had been met with disappointment.

Until the morning of March twenty-eighth.

The eight year old Uchiha had gone to bed that night with clear skin and that morning, the moment he had pulled off his shirt to begin his daily search to see if his soulmate had come to leave their mark, he had spotted his soulmark written across his left pectoral in a flowing script.

He had been so excited about it's appearance that it had taken him longer than he would care to admit to calm down and actually read the content. He had been thrilled to discover that he did indeed have a soulmate but the fact that the phrase now inked across his chest was the most random, nonsensical bullshit he had ever read in his short life dampened the feeling.

Shisui wondered if his soulmark was connecting him to a psychopath. He could not think of any other reason as to why someone's first words to him would be "Pants are not studying the green wheatgrass today you bastard".

What on earth could that even mean? Was it some sort of secret code? Was she going to be intoxicated? Or maybe poisoned?

Despite his elation at having been given a soulmate, he had begun to develop a few reservations. More than anything, he had been upset that he would have to keep his shirt on even during the hottest of days when he trained lest someone spot his gods awful soulmark.

Shisui had hoped to received a mark that was a bit more... romantic.

At least, when he looked at the positives, there was absolutely no way that he could possibly miss whoever his soulmate was. Some people had marks that basically guaranteed they would never be united with their mates. Marks like “hello”, “excuse me”, or “sorry”. He had the most specific soulmark, possibly out of all the soulmarks on the face of the planet.

Shisui just hoped that his soulmate would perhaps be in a drunken stupor when they finally met.

He had always been a hopeless romantic, constantly fantasizing over the first meeting with the person he was made for, the woman that the gods had tied him to. And there was no doubt in his young mind that his soulmate was a woman because the script on his chest, while absolutely bat shit crazy, was decidedly feminine.

He wanted the happily ever after that soulmarks promised and, while the content of the mark itself had put a damper on his discovery, he had already been excited to meet his soulmate.

Tomorrow, the day after, a year, a decade. However long it took, he would wait for her.

Shisui had tugged a clean shirt over his head but, for the rest of the day, he couldn't help but touch where the spirit of his soulmate had written on him. Directly over his heart...

Sakura had had her soulmark ever since she was born, although she hadn't been made aware of this fact until she was the tender age of five.

She had been at the academy studying when the girls in her class had gathered in a loose circle to show off their marks. Sakura had watched on, a feeling of shame building within her when she realized that she was the only girl in the class without a soulmark. Especially when the girls in her class had such romantic marks like “You're the prettiest girl I've ever met” and “I can't believe I finally found you”.

Before the other girls could ask her about her soulmark, and before Sakura had to admit she was one of the unmarked, she had fled the classroom under the guise of needing to use the restroom, trying to hide the hot tears building in the corners of her eyes as she ran.

When Sakura got home that day, she had asked her parents why she didn't have a mark like the rest of the girls in her class. Her parents had taken one look at each other before laughing in mirth, only further confusing Sakura. Her mother had handed her a hand mirror with a smile stretched across her face and had told her to go find it.

After a solid fifteen minute of searching and acts of stretching that even contortionists would be proud of, she had located her soulmark printed in a small, professional script in the crook where her inner thigh met her hip.

Sakura had initially been upset that her mark was in such a personal place, a spot that she could never show off to her friends. After reading the content of her mark, however, she couldn't find it in her the care any longer. After all, out of all the soulmarks the girls in her class had, hers was the most beautiful.

“I didn’t know angels had pink hair”.

She had been so overwhelmingly happy that she not only had a soulmark but that it was the most beautiful thing she had ever read. Although her satisfaction had dimmed minutely when Sasuke's first words were not the words on her mark. While she had been disappointed that her girlhood crush had not been her soulmate, she knew that her true mate, the boy who had been made for her and her for him, was out there waiting for her.

Sakura resolutely decided that she would wait for her soulmate. One day they would be united, just like in the fairy tales, and she would get her happily ever after.

Sakura held onto her fantasy for years. She would daydream about her soulmate, wonder what he did and who he was. She wondered if she would meet him soon, like how Naruto and Hinata had met, or if she would be a grown up when it finally happened, like her parents. She wondered if he was from her village or if he came from another country. If he was a shinobi or a civilian. If he was from a clan like her and Sasuke or a family all his own.

She had buried herself in these fantasies and had never even considered that she could lose her soulmate until one night years later.

Sakura had been eight years old when her soulmark had disappeared.

She had woken up with a sudden, burning pain where her mark was written, the pain so severe that it had dragged a cry from her tiny lungs. She had flown out of bed and sprinted to the bathroom to check, some part of her concerned that she had been somehow burned in her sleep.

When she had investigated the spot where the now familiar writing of her soulmate had been scripted, it had been gone. Her heart had stopped beating in her chest, tears instantly springing forth from her wide eyes. She had spent a frantic ten minutes searching for her missing mark, desperately hoping that it had somehow moved, before realizing that it was well and truly gone from her body.

Sakura's sobbing had woken her mother who had gently knocked on the bathroom door to ask what was wrong. Sakura had flung herself into her mother's arms, begging to know where her soulmark had gone, why it had disappeared, and why it had hurt so badly when it had.

With a heavy heart, Mebuki had explained to her that her soulmate had passed away.

Sakura had spent the rest of the night crying, heart broken over the fact that she had lost her soulmate. That the boy who she was meant for had died. She mourned for not only his death but for the loss of the future they would have had together. The happiness they would have shared after they had finally met and fallen in love.

She couldn't even remember having fallen asleep, only waking up that morning in her too bright, too colorful bedroom. After dragging herself from bed and rubbing off the stains on her cheeks from her tears, she had become distracted by the unusual sensation of warmth where her soulmark had once been. Her skin tingled oddly and, when she had investigated the spot, she had been thrilled to discover that her mark had returned.

While her soul mark had been a faded gray color instead of the pitch black text it normally was, she knew by the fact it was there and the feeling in her skin that her soulmate was alive.

When Sakura had told her mother about what had happened, that her mark had returned and that her soulmate was alive, her mother had told her that maybe someone from the medical core had saved his life. That maybe one of the medical ninja had been able to reach him and bring him back from death.

In that moment, Sakura discovered her calling.

Even at her young age, she knew that she was destined to become a healer. That she would one day help save not only the lives of the

injured but the lives of those who loved them. She promised herself that she would repay this favor she had been given a hundred, a thousand, times over.

When Sakura's soulmark fully recovered a week later, once again written across the crook of her inner thigh in ebony colored script, she already had half a bookshelf full of texts on anatomy and physiology and was already well on her way to becoming the youngest medical ninja in the history of the Leaf.

When Shisui was sixteen years old, he had died.

Or, perhaps more accurately: when Shisui was sixteen years old, he had killed himself.

That day would remain with him with the same clarity as the day that he had discovered his soulmark. It had been the day that he had finally told the Third Hokage and his advisers of his theoretical plan to use his Kotoamatsukami on Fugaku to force him to put an end to the Uchiha coup d'etat.

He had wanted to pursue this route as a last possible option but the revolt planned by his family was coming closer and closer to fruition everyday. It was only a matter of weeks before Fugaku implemented the Uchiha's plan to usurp the Hokage and lead a violent rebellion against the village. An uprising that would undoubtedly lead to attacks on the village from other countries. The revolt would mean the

beginning of the Fourth Shinobi War, so soon after the conclusion of the Third, and Shisui was desperate to stop the inevitable carnage.

Shisui had been relieved when Hiruzen had given him permission to pursue his plan, even if the calculating stare from Lord Danzo had the hairs on the back of his neck standing up. He had the gut feeling that something was wrong and he should have known better than to ignore it, his relief from the Third Hokage okaying his plan allowing him to look past something that would have had him on high alert in the field.

It was because of this lack of caution that he had allowed himself to be caught off guard when Danzo had summoned him to a stone temple on the outskirts of the village.

The village elder had argued a number of points that Shisui couldn't help but admit were valid. Ones he had no argument against.

Danzo had been right when he said that stopping the coup wouldn't change how the village treated his clan. He had been right when he said that Hiruzen's promise to make the village change how they treated his family was impossible. He had been right when he had said that it didn't matter how much time passed, distrustful people such as himself would never change.

When Danzo had demanded to know if Shisui would use his Kotoamatsukami on him if he himself refused to change, the Uchiha silently knew that he would.

Lord Danzo had always been a stoic and gruff man, the old war hawk heeding his own counsel before the counsel of others. While this had lead to a number of confrontations in the past, Shisui could honestly say that he believed that the elder man had the village's best interest in mind. The man would do anything it took to protect the village and those in it.

Even going as far as to try to steal his eyes.

Danzo's cry of "Your sharingan shall be in my safekeeping!" had sent a thrill of dread down to his toes almost as quick as the adrenaline that immediately pumped into his blood.

Shisui had expected a debate but hadn't expected the bold assault. It was only due to his lightning fast reflexes, honed from hundreds of battles, that he had been able to activate his sharingan and place Danzo under a genjutsu in time to avoid his attack. Even though the man had been the one to attack him, he hadn't wanted to hurt him, instead asking for his forgiveness as he turned his bloodline jutsu against a member of his own village.

He just needed enough time to implement his plan to place Fugaku under Kotoamatsukami, to stop the revolt. He would deal with any consequences later.

When he had turned to leave, Danzo had shocked Shisui by appearing before him, laying a punch into his gut so severe that it only furthered his stunned state. A weakened condition only made much worse by the sudden blinding pain of the strikes to his face and the sharp sting in his scalp as the elder shinobi grabbed him by his hair to throw him upwards.

It had taken half of a second for the Uchiha to recover from his stunned state but it had been all the time that Danzo had needed. Shisui hadn't felt pain when Danzo had ripped out his eye in a strike quicker than a snake bite, instead feeling the jarring sensation of the sudden loss of something that had always been there.

Shisui had shot backwards, his hand instinctively coming up to cover the socket where his eye had been just a moment previous. The sudden loss of his eye resulted in a strange shift in depth perception that the Uchiha knew would have him at a serious disadvantage if this fight continued. His remaining sharingan struggled to adjust to focus on his foe while his mind struggled to understand the sight he was presented with.

Shisui had been surprised by a number of things in his lifetime. He had been surprised to find an unlikely companionship in his young cousin years ago. He had been startled by individuals who could keep up with his speed in battle. He had been shocked by sudden and uniquely powerful jutsu that had been thrown at him as he faced enemies on the field.

But nothing in his life compared to the unadulterated alarm he felt when Danzo pulled back the bandages wrapped around his head, revealing a stolen sharingan implanted in his hidden eye. Shisui watched in shock as the familiar crimson red of his stolen sharingan faded to gray, revealing to him that the elder shinobi had managed to not only discover but utilize the hidden Uchiha jutsu Izanagi.

“Give me the other one.”

Dread settled in Shisui's heart as he realized the lengths Danzo would go to fulfill his plan, to stop him from putting an end to the coup. In that moment, as members of the Foundation gathered around the elder shinobi, he realized with no small amount of despair that he would not live passed this day.

Flying through the familiar hand signs for the Uchiha clan's signature Fireball Jutsu, Shisui used the burst of steam from his flame meeting his opponent's water jutsu to flee.

If he was going to die, it would be on his own terms. Terms that insured the survival of his best friend, a man who he knew would maintain peace in the village no matter the cost. Terms that would mean the people he loved most in this world would be safe.

It was only Shisui's knowledge of Itachi's scheduled patrol that day that allowed him to find his cousin. He had wanted to prevent the younger Uchiha from witnessing, and possibly preventing, him from using his most powerful genjutsu on Itachi's own father to plant false memories and force an end to the revolt.

With a whisper, he urged Itachi to follow him to the cliffside where Shisui knew he would die. He gazed up at the crescent moon for the last time, giving himself a few heartbeats to enjoy the sight he had often taken for granted before his best friend silently appeared behind him.

"It's too late to stop the coup d'etat by the Uchiha. If civil war breaks out in the leaf village, other nations are sure to attack... which means a full scale war," Shisui started, keeping his back turned to the

younger male as he tore his gaze away from the sight of the moon.

When he turned, he watched Itachi's eyes widen at the sight of his missing eye.

"I was going to try to stop the coup d'etat with Kotoamatsukami but Lord Danzo took my right eye. He doesn't trust me. He intends to protect the village his own way, no matter what it takes or how it looks," he revealed, taking a deep steeling breath as he prepared for what was to come.

"I suspect he'll come after my left eye as well. So I want to give it to you before he has a chance."

After having had his eye violently stolen from his head not even ten minutes previous, his own cautious extraction was far less jarring. The only thing that was able to breach his careful composure was the sudden, complete blindness followed by Itachi quietly whispering his name in muted horror.

"You're the only person I can count on, my best friend. Please protect this village... and the honor of the Uchiha name."

With his sight gone, the only thing that informed Shisui that his wishes would be honored was the familiar sound of a crow summons appearing to take away his eye for safe keeping. One of the many crow summons that him and Itachi both shared. The sound of feathers, a sound which once filled him with comfort and companionship, now

filled him with a sense of finality.

“I accept it.” Anyone else would be fooled by Itachi's carefully composed words but Shisui knew better. “What will you do now?”

Shisui felt his heart clench in his chest, guilt wracking through him over what he was about to do to his best friend. He hated the thought of having to break his brother's heart in such a way, to force him to witness what he was about to do, but knew there was no other way. This was the right thing to do to save his family. This would allow him to give Itachi the power to stop the revolt, to save Sasuke, and to save himself.

There was no choice left.

“If I die, several circumstances will change...” Shisui explained as he took a step backwards towards the cliff he knew was at his back. He could hear the rushing water from the waterfall behind him, the sound making his heart race as he inched closer to his death.

“I've left behind a note already.”

The sudden flare of chakra from Itachi told him the younger Uchiha had pieced together what he was about to do.

“Wait, Shisui!” Itachi cried out, the desperation in his voice making

Shisui's chest ache.

“Don't stop me, Itachi.”

He gave his best friend, his closest companion and a man he considered a brother, one final smile before taking the final step backwards. The sensation of the world falling out beneath his feet made his heart leap in his chest but, even as he felt the fear rush through his body, he refused to let it show.

He didn't want this moment to be more horrible than it had to be for Itachi. Even as he committed his own suicide, his concern was focused on his best friend and not himself.

“Shisui!” Itachi screamed as Shisui fell, his voice sounding so far away as he began to plummet.

Shisui was grateful for his blindness in that moment because he couldn't see the look on Itachi's face as he plummeted towards the raging waters below.

Take care of them.

As Shisui plunged towards the rapids beneath him, the sensation of rapidly increasing speed racing across his skin, he thought of his soulmate. He wondered if she would even be cognizant enough to notice his death, if she was even capable of caring. He hoped that she

would avoid the heartbreak of knowing her soulmate had died. He prayed his suicide wouldn't hurt even more people, let alone his innocent mate who didn't even know his name or his voice.

At least he prayed.

And then there was nothing.

When Shisui had begun to regain consciousness, he had thought that he was in the afterlife.

He first became aware of the fact he was lying down. As his awareness expanded, he could feel the sensation of something wrapped around him as well as the softness of cloth beneath his fingertips. He became aware of the fact that he was warm, shortly followed by the sickly scent of cleaning chemicals that were frequently used in the hospital in Konoha.

It was this realization, and the confusion that came with it, that had finally forced him to return to himself entirely and open his eyes. When his crisp gaze was met with the sight of a too white ceiling of a familiar hospital room, his confusion only amplified.

This was not the afterlife.

“Shisui,” Itachi's familiar voice had come from beside him, Shisui sluggishly tilting his head to regard his closest friend.

The young man had appeared as if he hadn't slept in days, the bags beneath his eyes all the more pronounced. Even with his ragged, sleepless exterior, Itachi had a hesitant smile on his lips as he sat up straight in the chair at Shisui's bedside. Sunlight poured in from the window behind him, illuminating the meticulously cleaned hospital room in a near blinding glow.

In the handful of heartbeats it took for Shisui to understand what he was seeing, why he was seeing, where he was, and what it meant, he had been assaulted by a barrage of emotion. Anger at having his last wishes ignored, concern at seeing his best friend so worn to the bone, and fear at the fate of their clan.

“What happened, Itachi?” he had demanded, the edge in his tone still sharp despite the weakness in his unused voice.

A thousand questions were just beneath the surface of his single demand, a thousand questions which Itachi understood without them having a voice behind them: Why can he see? How long had he been asleep? Had the revolt occurred? Had they taken over the village? Was their family dead? Were they at war again?

Itachi had dropped his head in shame before he began.

He had told him he had been out cold for a week. A week that had changed the course of history.

Itachi admitted to not wanting to allow Shisui to die. How he had been too selfish to live without his best friend at his side. How he had been too frightened, had felt too lost, to stop the revolt by himself. How he had instead thrown himself into the rapids after him, dragging Shisui's unbreathing and broken body from the water and taking him to the hospital.

It was there that Itachi had told Hiruzen of what had happened. How Danzo had attacked Shisui, how he had stolen his eye to prevent him from stopping the coup. The Third Hokage, distraught and infuriated by a grievous assault on one of the many citizens of the village he considered one of his children, had confronted Danzo about his betrayal.

The battle that ensued as Danzo tried, for the second time Itachi would later learn, to kill Hiruzen was one that demolished a portion of the forest and which had spawned fires that still burned even now. A battle which left Danzo in chains and Hiruzen returning Shisui's stolen eye.

With a heavy heart, Hiruzen had put his once close friend to death for his crimes against the village. While the reasoning given to the public for his death sentence was an assault on Shisui the Teleporter to steal his famed eyes in order to instill himself as leader of the village, information about his shadowy organization The Foundation and Shisui's plan to use his sharingan to stop the coup remained out of public knowledge.

Even then, the Foundation was being quietly disbanded, the members either being absorbed by ANBU, being reintegrated into the shinobi population, or silently scattering to the winds as they abandoned the village.

Itachi told Shisui of how Danzo's assault and the justice that followed had made way for proper negotiations with their clan. Negotiations that took place under the guise of the Uchiha threatening to leave the village as opposed to revolt against it.

The Uchiha's viewed Hiruzen punishing one of his closest advisers with death following the attack on Shisui as being a show of absolute trust and camaraderie with the Uchiha. How the return of Shisui's stolen sharingan, the most precious thing to an Uchiha shinobi, was seen as an act of respect and faith. A course of action that instilled doubt in the rebellion and a rekindled hope in the village.

With a smile that contained both hope and fear, Itachi told Shisui of the agreement brought upon by the negotiations between Fugaku and Hiruzen: that Itachi would be groomed to be the future Hokage and, when he came of age, Hiruzen would step down and pass down his seat to his successor. A plan that both sides were satisfied with, considering Itachi's connection with the Uchiha but loyalty to the village.

Shisui thought he was going to lose consciousness again with his heart racing in his chest from his excitement. He had never imagined that such a outcome could have occurred, that his near death could inspire peace in such a way. He had died that night praying that peace would come but he had no inkling that it would be because of his near death that his wish would be fulfilled.

Despite the elder Uchiha being furious with Itachi for blatantly ignoring his final wishes, for disrespecting his will in such a way, he could nearly find it in him to forgive him after he had somehow come up with a way to peace that didn't include war.

But secretly and selfishly, Shisui was happy to be alive. Not only because he could enjoy a peace he had never had the pleasure of basking in but that he once again had the chance to meet his soulmate...

Five years passed after the dreaded day where Sakura had briefly lost her soulmate and her mark.

Five years of the more rigorous training of her life as she dedicated herself to becoming a medical ninja on par with the legend Lady Tsunade and the founder of medical ninjutsu, the First Hokage Hashirama Senju.

Her studies set her apart even farther from her young classmates, her status as top student in the class and as one of the most promising shinobi of her age group further expanding to the most promising medical ninja of her generation. She took to these titles proudly, furthering her studies and training at the hospital where she served as an apprentice under the medical ninja Sukui for two years.

It was during this blossoming that she began to come into herself, her growing skill feeding her confidence.

By the time Sakura had graduated the academy, her other classmates were fighting over who would be assigned to her team, everyone wanting to be paired with the kunoichi who was already considered a medical ninja by the community despite not even holding the rank of genin. She had spent enough time helping out (or rather training on) her injured friends that none wanted to be separated from her and her healing jutsu.

When Sakura had been assigned to Team 7 with Sasuke and Naruto, she had been happy to be on a team with two people that she considered to be good friends. Although Naruto had been loudly unhappy about being placed on a team apart from Hinata.

The blond and the shy Hyuga had discovered that they were each others' soulmates far younger than anyone else in the class, the two realizing their connection at the unheard of age of five. The pair, despite being too young for romance, had been inseparable. At least until now.

The newly anointed Team 7 had been assigned the famous Kakashi Hatake as their mentor. The power house team of the future Fifth Hokage's little brother, the medical prodigy, and the Nine Tailed jinchuriki needed the supervision of an exemplary jonin to maximize their potential (and to keep them out of trouble it appeared as well).

Sakura had thought of herself as being one of the most valuable shinobi in her class. Her skill with medical ninjutsu had set her apart not only from her peers but even from the medical ninja who worked in the hospital she had spent years being an apprentice at. However, when Sakura finally saw her first battle against the Demon Brothers of the Mist, she had the crushing realization that her skills were dramatically lacking.

Despite being the most intelligent of her class, next to Shikamaru Nara, and despite her skills as a healer, she was woefully unprepared for the reality of combat. Her skills had been incredibly useful following the battle but Sakura had never felt more useless as she healed the cuts and abrasions dotting her friends and teammates who had protected her during the fight.

This feeling of helplessness fueled her need to learn more, to train more, to be able to save those she cared about from even feeling the pain from an injury as opposed to just cleaning up the aftermath. A mentality that helped her strengthen her body and hone her fighting skills to the point where, when the Chunin Exams came around, she felt confident enough to rise to the challenge.

An attitude, or rather an over confidence, that she would later feel nearly got those she cared about killed.

As her, Sasuke, and Naruto attempted to fight off a mysterious Grass Ninja, one hell bent on killing them with an ease that Sakura felt reflected a skill level far higher than a simple genin, she realized her mistake. She realized the very real danger they were in and the fact that, despite all of her training and determination, they were going to die.

If not for Sasuke's brother and his cousin Izumi appearing to save their lives and chase off the man who they called Orochimaru, Sakura felt as if they would have all died that day. Or perhaps something worse, as this Orochimaru had been in the process of attempting to bite Sasuke from across the field with his hideously elongated neck.

The rest of their challenge in the Forest of Death was met with more and more failure as they were assaulted by a group of Sound Shinobi that challenged every member of her team. Naruto had been knocked unconscious by a boy with tunnels in his hand that could produce great gusts of wind while Sasuke had been incapacitated by a strange device on another boy's arm that had him screaming on the ground as he clutched his head.

Before Sakura could even reach her teammates to heal them, to use the one skill she had spent years developing and that was supposed to set her apart from the rest, she had been grabbed by the hair by the kunoichi on the team of Sound Ninja.

The girl's taunting would forever stick with Sakura. Her ridicule of her well maintained hair, her mocking over her lack of fighting skill, and her taunting over her physical weakness still haunted her. It was this vicious girl's torment that finally forced Sakura to take action.

Sakura had sliced off her own hair, giving her just enough time to run through the hand signs for a replacement jutsu. What followed was one of the most desperate gambles of her life, a dance which resulted in her landing a hit of one of the shinobi just grievous enough to get the moment she needed to return Sasuke to his senses. An action that gave her just the advantage she needed to fall back to Naruto and bring him back from unconsciousness.

She had just barely given them the edge they needed to run for their lives. It had been a hollow victory but one that left them alive. It had been good enough for her, even if the pain where her pride had once been stung worse than the deep puncture wounds on her shins and forearms.

The rest of the Chunin Exams had been marked with a shocking number of victories following their hideous near defeats in the Forest of Death. Sasuke's defeat of Yoroi Akado, Naruto's shocking victory over Kiba Inuzuka, and her own bolstering triumph over her close friend and rival Ino Yamanaka.

Sakura felt as if she should have been more suspicious of their sudden good fortune. She should have been more concerned when her sensei Sukui had the perfect medical ninjutsu to teach her to stabilize her vestibular system in her inner ear which would render Dosu's technique useless during their final bout. She felt as if she should have been alarmed following her impressive defeat of Dosu, one of the shinobi who had assaulted her and her team in the Forest of Death.

She should have listened to the rising anxiety she could feel building within her. An instinctual dread that culminated with the assault on Konoha, marked by the blood curdling scream from within Gaara's sand shell and the lulling sensation of a genjutsu which tugged at the back of her mind.

The brief fight in the stadium, one which was dominated by Kakashi and Gai, was rapidly followed by a desperate chase into the forest to follow Sasuke after he left in pursuit of Gaara to finish their match. The battle that followed had ended with Sakura desperately trying to defend Sasuke from the monstrous sand ninja only to be reminded of her weakness once again as she was pinned to a tree by a claw of sand and knocked unconscious.

When she woke up, the only difference she made in the battle was once again picking up the pieces at the end.

It was after the smoke finally settled and the fires were finally put out, after the Third Hokage's funeral and Sasuke's brothers ascension to the seat of Fifth Hokage, that Sakura found herself overwhelmed by not only the events of the Chunin Exams but the aftermath of the assault. The hospital was overflowing with injured and Sakura spent every day since the battle tending to her new patients.

It was during this time that Sakura lamented over her weakness. Despite saving her friends in the Forest of Death, despite winning her match against Dosu, and despite her spending her days tending to patients at the hospital, she still felt useless. She didn't know who to turn to to help her learn to fight. To help her learn to protect her loved ones.

Her hopelessness only magnified when she was asked to help with Rock Lee's case, the boy who had had his arm and leg crushed by Gaara during the Chunin Exams. She had only met him once and had been alarmed by his odd way of flirting right before he challenged Sasuke to a fight. When they first spoke, she had been surprised to learn that he was one of the unmarked. Despite his disappointment when he learned that she had been given a soulmate, they had struck up an easy friendship that, despite its comfortable nature, was always overshadowed by the dark cloud of his crippling injuries.

Lee was startlingly optimistic about his recovery, even after being told that he would never be able to be a ninja again. Sakura had wanted to do anything she could to help but, no matter what she tried, she found that she made no difference in his condition. The only thing she found herself able to help with had been abating his pain as his broken body desperately tried to recover.

Just another thing to add to the growing list in her mind of ways that she felt she was useless.

The only thing to pull her from her thoughts had been her overhearing a rumor from another hospital worker that Itachi was sending Jiraiya, a man who had become Naruto's new sensei, and Naruto out on a mission to seek out the legendary medical ninja Tsunade.

There were so many injured and so many critical cases that the hospital was ill equipped to handle. The return of Tsunade could mean the difference in life and death, or perhaps more importantly life and a life of suffering, in the numerous injured patients in the hospital.

One of those cases being Lee.

Sakura had just barely been able to catch Naruto on his way out of the village. She hadn't even been sure what she wanted to say and, when she frantically tried to piece together her thoughts, tears came instead. She told her teammate that she had done everything in her power to help Lee but neither her nor anyone else could save him.

She had pleaded with Naruto to bring back Tsunade back to save their friend.

"Naruto, I beg you! Please! Please bring Lady Tsunade back! I couldn't do it... I couldn't save Lee... The only person who can probably save him is her..."

Naruto, in his normal boisterous way, had declared that he would bring Tsunade home

“Don't worry, I'll bring her back! Promise of a lifetime!”

A promise that Sakura knew he would keep. And one that was fulfilled when he returned, just a week later, with the legend herself and her attendant Shizune.

Sakura could still remember watching Tsunade in amazement through the observation window in the OR as the elder woman pieced Lee's broken body back together. She had been overcome with how incredible Tsunade's feat had been and it was only when she felt the woman's eyes on her that she finally snapped out of her daze.

She watched as Tsunade had a brief conversation with Sukui, her current sensei, who had assisted in the surgery. She watched as her sensei said something with a smile, Tsunade's expression morphing into one of shock before her gaze shot back to Sakura. She had nearly shied away, intimidated by the sudden attention of the legend herself, but remained.

When Tsunade had smiled at her, nodding in approval, Sakura had felt a burst of pride.

In that moment, she knew what she had to do to overcome her own weakness, to continue to grow to be a medical ninja who could protect her loved ones, and to become the kunoichi she always wanted.

The next day, Sakura had approached Tsunade in her new office, the

woman having taken over as director of the hospital. She strode up to her desk, appearing more confident than she had felt, and had asked Tsunade to take her on as her apprentice. To teach her to heal like she did, to fight like she did, and to be a kunoichi like her.

When Tsunade asked if she was the medical prodigy that she had been hearing so much about, the youngest medical ninja in history, and the one to handle Rock Lee's case before her arrival, Sakura had been surprised by the question but had answered truthfully.

An answer that was met with another nod of approval.

When Tsunade had agreed to take her on as her apprentice, Sakura had nearly begun to cry from her exhilaration. An elation that only magnified when Tsunade had suggested they go to one of the training fields to test her skills on the battlefield.

But a euphoria that had quickly diminished when Sakura spent the afternoon desperately skittering around strikes powerful enough to decimate mountains, ducking beneath thrown boulders that were larger than she was, and buckling under blows powerful enough to toss her across the training field.

No matter what it took, however, Sakura would do whatever it took to be the best medical ninja, the most powerful kunoichi, in all of the nations. She would make good on her debt, she would become a shinobi who she could once again feel proud of being, and she would become the person who could protect her loved ones.

And all the while she trained, she wondered if her soulmate would be proud of her as well, wherever he was.

It had been five years before Itachi finally assumed the mantle of Hokage. Five years of peace that abruptly ended with an assault upon Konoha lead by the Sand and Sound during the Chunin Exams.

It had been decided that Itachi would be handed the seat of Hokage following the conclusion of the Konoha held Chunin Exams, an change in leadership that had been expected and prepared for for the past five years. None had expected Itachi to assume his role by instead inheriting a decimated village following the assault on the village and the death of the Third Hokage.

On the morning following the attack, shortly after the burial and funeral for Hiruzen Sarutobi, Itachi Uchiha was named Fifth Hokage, the first Uchiha Hokage and the youngest Hokage to ever assume power. An event that should have been looked upon with pride and celebration had instead been treated as a solemn event overlaid with the sorrow of everyone's mourning of the deceased Third Hokage.

Some even looked upon Itachi's ascension with distrust, a wariness that was only abated by the Uchiha clan having proven it's loyalty to still wary villagers by throwing themselves into the fray to protect civilian and shinobi alike. While Orochimaru lead an assault against the village and perpetrated the assassination of the Third Hokage, the Uchiha clan had banded together to lead a counter assault of their own. One lead by Shisui and Itachi themselves.

It was only due to this show of loyalty that Itachi's induction as the Fifth Hokage was met with no resistance from the still uneasy villagers. And it was due to Itachi's handling of the aftermath of the assault that Konoha began to not only accept but respect the Uchiha.

Even Shisui found himself impressed with his best friend's handling of the consequences of the attack, his meticulous plans for recovery so spectacularly successful that it was only a few short months before the village had returned to its prime. Perhaps even better than where it had been before the assault.

The recovery period had been marked by a number of dramatic alterations to the village, all of which made a notable positive impact on the operations of the village and its people. The most notable change, and the most helpful not only for the villagers themselves but for their morale, had been the return of the legendary Lady Tsunade. The Senju had taken over as director for the hospital and the changes she herself implemented in her hospital revolutionized the health care system for civilians and shinobi alike.

It was during this recovery period that Shisui found himself being called into his best friend's office, a summons that he doubted would ever lose its novelty.

It was at this critical juncture, this dramatic change in the lives of everyone in the village, that Shisui found his own life was changing as well. Itachi had asked Shisui to take over as leader of the Royal Guard and to personally supervise the protection of the Fire Daimyo at his palace. A position of great respect and responsibility and one which Shisui had been glad to accept.

Secretly, Shisui wondered if this was where he would finally meet his soulmate. It had been thirteen years since the appearance of his soulmark and, while his soulmate would undoubtedly be too young for romance, he still desperately wanted to finally meet them. To know their name, their face, to put a voice to the writing on his chest, and to get to know who they were.

When Shisui first arrived at the Fire Daimyo's palace with a contingent of his own hand picked guards, he had gone out of his way to introduce himself to each and every individual in the palace, young and old alike. He had insisted that it was so he could get a read on every person who would be under his protection but, secretly, it had been to see if his soulmate had been hidden among the population.

He had tried to temper his disappointment when none of the people he met responded to his friendly greetings with the nonsensical phrase plastered across his chest.

For two months, Shisui found himself adjusting to being the leader of the contingent protecting the Fire Daimyo. Just when he finally felt comfortable in his position, familiar with the land, and even more familiar with the people under his care, he had been surprised once again. This time in a far more pleasant way.

A happy surprise in the form of his baby cousin, Sasuke, showing up at the gate of the Fire Palace, side by side with the additional guards he had requested from Konoha.

Despite Shisui's confusion at having suddenly gained an unexpected

subordinate, and a unlikely apprentice based on the letter from Itachi that Sasuke had brought with him, he was thrilled to have his baby cousin there to keep him company.

Even though Shisui had been unlucky, perhaps his cute cousin could meet his soulmate while he was serving under him? The person with wild handwriting who would one day tell him that “Just because you're the most gorgeous man I've ever met doesn't mean I won't kick your ass”.

Although Sasuke would have to work on his attitude, his desperate search for the strength to finally impress Fugaku making the young Uchiha difficult company.

Shisui could understand Sasuke's desire for power, knowing without direct knowledge that Fugaku had been especially hard on the boy following his lack of a promotion following the disastrous Chunin Exams (something that he was certain was a point of contention between him and Itachi as well), especially considering Itachi's and his own sudden rise to prestigious positions.

Shisui gladly took Sasuke on not only as his subordinate but, at Itachi's request, as his apprentice. While they trained together to hone Sasuke's skill as a shinobi, he hoped to teach him a bit about learning to have pride in who he was outside of his father's approval.

After all, if Sasuke only knew what his father had almost done to the village. That he had tried to instigate a traitorous blood bath that had only been subverted by Shisui's own suicide attempt.

A story for another time. And certainly not one for him to tell.

And as the days, months, and then years passed, Shisui continued to make sure he introduced himself to every new face at the palace, hoping to soon hear the nonsensical phrase on his chest uttered from some beautiful woman who he had been made for.

Chapter End Notes

Sukui, Sakura's first sensei, is actually a medical ninja from Konoha in canon.

Sakura's Soulmark

Chapter Notes

I hadn't even realized that I hadn't written anything for my stories in almost a month until I sat down the day after taking my final exam. I had been struggling so hard with one of my nursing school classes to the point where everything but studying, eating, and sleeping was put onto the back burner of my life. It had come to the point where, if I did poorly on my final exam (the hardest test I've ever taken) that I would have to give up my dream of becoming a nurse and more than likely my dream to become a doctor as well. My life was riddled with anxiety, fear, and self loathing and I was unable to enjoy the things I loved without shame. But, I'm so happy to say that I was able to pass the class! I want to say thank you to everything who gave me their love and support, I am so grateful to everyone! So please, enjoy this next chapter, I was thinking about all of you when I wrote it! And a special thank you to all of you who follow me on Tumblr and who gave me your well wishes, all of your kind words touched my heart!

As for the story, three years have passed. Shisui is now 24, Itachi is 21, and Sakura, Sasuke, and Naruto are all 16. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Shisui looked out at the towering buildings of the sprawling city which surrounded him, a place so unlike Konoha not in its vastness but in its shameless opulence. The massive spires were painted in bright shocks of color which did little to stand out against the springtime flora. The steep, stacked rooftops of the more traditionally built towers stood tall over the smaller buildings which housed the servants and merchants who worked in the city that had grown around the Fire Daimyo's palace.

The city had been all that Shisui had known for the past three years as he served as the head captain of the Royal Guard, the Fire Daimyo's and the capital city's protectors. While he had grown accustomed to the capital, he found he missed the chaos of Konoha.

He missed the mishmash of brightly colored buildings planted alongside traditionally built homes like rebel children; the tangled web of wires that fed power to the city and that ninja had to be particularly careful of while navigating the rooftops; the cracked roads that crisscrossed the city, freely intermingling with fresh pavement of new streets and pressed dirt of hundred year old pathways. Konoha was chaos incarnate, a city of disarray held together by nothing more than comradeship and the famous will of fire and, no matter how Shisui grew used to the capital city, it could never replace Konoha in his heart.

He missed his home.

A gentle breeze blew across the bridge Shisui stood upon, rustling his messy locks as if in comfort and bringing with it the scent of the flowering cherry blossoms. The changing of seasons had since passed, winter having slowly released the lands from its chilled winds and having made way for the gradual warmth of spring. Now, instead of the air holding the sting of cold, it held the scent of flowering flora and the sound of awakening insects and venturing fledgelings.

The Uchiha's gaze sunk down from the grand towers of the city to the grove of cherry blossom trees which surrounded the spire he and many of his comrades had called home over the past few years. The decorative trees made a stark backslash of color against the vast pool of water which surrounded the bridge he stood on and the one which lead into his home. Two great pyres of flame flanked either side of the bridge, a tribute to the many Uchiha who served in the Royal Guard with Shisui.

Even though Shisui could not help but think that the petals which drifted in the gentle breeze were beautiful, his thoughts were distracted by more important matters. His gaze dropped further down to the still waters beneath the bridge he stood upon as he once again became lost to his thoughts.

Today was the day he was sending Sasuke home.

He thought of the three years he had spent with the young Uchiha, pride filling his heart as he considered how far his young cousin had come. At how much he had grown since he showed up at the doorstep of the palace unannounced with the two guards Shisui had requested and a note from Itachi.

Although the note had been burned long ago, Shisui could still remember the contents of the message from his chosen brother. How he had explained how Sasuke was searching for a sensei to train him, someone who could help him obtain the power he sought. How his little brother wanted to bring prestige to their family, like their father wanted. How Itachi trusted only Shisui to not only teach his little brother but to take care of him in the way he needed.

Shisui hadn't needed any more information to understand the hidden meaning behind Itachi's words at the time.

While him and Itachi were well aware of Fugaku's past, of how the eldest Uchiha almost brought a world war upon their heads with his greed, Sasuke was unaware of his transgressions. He saw Fugaku as a father he needed to impress and he was desperate for the praise which had since then only been bestowed upon Itachi.

Itachi trusted Shisui to keep Sasuke from hurting himself as he searched for the love and praise he would never get from a man who wasn't even worthy of giving it. And Shisui could never let down his brother and his best friend.

Shisui had double checked with Sasuke to make sure he was okay with what laid ahead, to let him know how he would be the drudge during his brutal training and how he wouldn't be afforded any special privileges simply for being the Hokage's little brother. Sasuke had

relished the challenge, the teen enjoying being treated as a shinobi instead of someone to be coddled.

Sasuke had, however, brought up his not so mysterious goal that fueled his need to become stronger during this first meeting.

While Shisui had sussed out Sasuke's secret ambition long before he had even opened his mouth, it took far longer for him to get the younger Uchiha to open up about it. The first time he had tried to speak to him about it had ended in disaster, Sasuke having challenging him to a fight which ended with the genin in a sharingan induced genjutsu for the rest of the night. Every conversation about it afterwards had always been about as successful as the first, the teen's words always steeped in analogy and hidden meanings.

While Sasuke hadn't improved in abandoning his futile goal at earning the respect of his father, he had greatly improved in his skills as a shinobi.

He had grown skilled with his use of a sword, his awakening of his sharingan allowing him to quickly pick up on the craft. What had proven to be an arduous task, however, was forcing him to challenge the usefulness of his trump card, the Chidori. Shisui had first challenged him with a simple fireball and had been baffled when the younger Uchiha had charged straight through the blaze like he could defeat the fire with willpower alone.

When Sasuke wound up unconscious on the floor of the sunken stone stadium from oxygen loss, dozens of Uchiha guards looking on in mild horror, Shisui had thought that Sasuke's stubbornness could easily be seen as stupidity.

Although it had been that absurd stubbornness that had pushed Sasuke to further develop the Chidori into a technique all his own: the

Chidori Stream. A jutsu which could not only best Shisui's Fireball jutsu but one that could defeat his A-rank Fire Dragon jutsu in an explosion of flames and stray bolts of electricity.

If anything, Sasuke's tenacity was to be admired. Although the fact the young man hadn't bothered to ask one of the guards just to teach him a *water jutsu* made Shisui think he had missed the point of the exercise in its entirety.

It was easier to dig a hole with a shovel than a rake but he supposed Sasuke just figured out how to use the rake with great efficiency.

The edge of Shisui's lip barely quirked up although the amused smile didn't quite reach his eyes. He wished he could look back upon the years he had spent with his young cousin with more cheer but the current situation didn't allow him to consider anything with more than a heavy heart.

A frown pulled at his features as he watched a ripple travel through the still waters below him, disturbed by freshly fallen cherry blossoms. His thoughts of a past filled with comradery and growth were drawn back to the object of his concern: a report he had received from the scouts that patrolled the outskirts of the city.

A large grouping of shinobi were amassing on the outer edge of the forest which surrounded them, the small army rapidly forming in what they thought was utter stealth. The scouts had assured him that it was likely a group of rebels, dissatisfied with the rule of the Fire Daimyo, who were preparing for an assault against the palace.

Normally, Shisui would have wanted to use this opportunity as a way to test how far Sasuke had come in his training. He knew how desperate his cousin was to prove himself, however, and knew how that kind of desperation could easily get him killed.

He had seen plenty of men and women throw their lives away for pride when they threw themselves into a fight without thinking. It never mattered how skilled they were when desperation fogged their senses.

Shisui could never forgive himself, not to mention that Itachi would never forgive him either, if he allowed Sasuke to kill himself on his watch.

It was that desperation within Sasuke that influenced Shisui's decision to send the younger Uchiha home early. He had claimed that his training was over and that his replacement was soon to arrive, hoping to quell the younger Uchiha's suspicions and to have him head home without any needless "stops".

The statement had been true enough. There was nothing more that Sasuke could learn from him either way and returning to Konoha a little early would only serve to make him look better in the eyes of Fugaku. Although, when it came to that man...

Shisui sensed Sasuke's approach before he heard his footsteps on the wood planks of the bridge. Even when he was relaxed, his footfalls were silent to anyone with less training than Shisui. He allowed himself the small comfort in knowing that Sasuke had at least grown powerful enough to be able to defend himself under his tutelage even if he couldn't trust him on a true battlefield quite yet.

"So you're finally heading back to the village with the others..." Shisui began before humming in thought, "It doesn't feel as if it's been three years already."

"That's not surprising considering it's only been two years and nine

months,” Sasuke quipped in return, adjusting the straps of the pack fastened to his back.

Shisui couldn’t help the genuine smile of amusement. He had spent years training his cousin but the one thing he could never train out of him was his attitude.

‘Little shit.’

“You’ve learned all you can from me here. It’ll be good for you to go home,” he replied instead.

“Hn. I’ll finally get to see if all this hard work has helped me fulfill my goal.”

The elder Uchiha’s smile disappeared, instead replaced with a grimace.

“It’s none of my business, but... It’s good to have a goal. But getting too attached to a goal can lead someone off the right path,” he finally turned his gaze away from the once again still waters to level his frowning cousin with a beseeching look, “I want you to remember that.”

“Your interference is unnecessary,” Sasuke huffed with a scowl as he turned and began to walk away.

His cousin paused for a moment once he was halfway across the bridge, the silence between them stretching before he finally muttered, “But... thank you for everything, Shisui.”

Shisui watched as Sasuke continued on his journey without another word, his eyes lingering on his back until he disappeared around the bend leading away from the place they once both called home.

‘I want to be there, to help pick up the pieces when you realize your goal is a fool’s errand...’ Shisui thought before quietly sighing, *‘But I guess that’s out of the question since I’m stuck here...’*

He finally tore his eyes away from the empty space his cousin and his student once inhabited, his gaze instead returning to the grove of cherry blossom trees across the pool of water. He watched, anxiety clawing at his insides, as a breeze pulled another batch of tender blossoms from the tree and deposited them into the waters.

‘I wonder what you would say about all this, soulmate...’

The sensation of speed washed over Shisui’s skin as he bolted through the treetops, his footsteps silent against the branches. His basic level sharingan took in the environment at high speeds, nothing in his surroundings being lost to him in his heightened state of awareness.

Beams of moonlight peeked through the darkened branches, illuminating the otherwise pitch black night time forest. The nocturnal animals paid him no mind, unable to sense him as he stealthily moved through the trees. Quietly flowing brooks and rivers spanned the breadth of the forest around them, spider webbing across the land. The night was warm although the breeze still held a faint chill, the last remnants of a long forgotten winter.

His attention returned forward, his thoughts focusing on the battle

that him and his comrades would still be a part of. He had chosen four of the most skilled shinobi that the Royal Guard had to offer to join him on this mission: two of his own cousins, an Inuzuka, and the Inuzuka's massive canine partner.

Shisui could only sense the expertly hidden chakra of his strike force due to years of working side by side with them. He trusted these shinobi with his life and knew that they did the same for him. The group easily flitted through the canopy, moving as silently as wraiths as they descended upon the gathering of rebels.

"Shisui," the Inuzuka started, her gravely voice low, "We're getting close. I can smell their group to the northwest but but it is much smaller than we had been lead to believe. There is no other activity in the area."

"A trap then," Shisui replied with narrowed eyes.

"Most likely."

"Very well. Let's see what they have in store for us then. Everyone get into position."

The Inuzuka nodded curtly before her and her partner disappeared into the ground beneath the trees, utilizing their earth chakra nature and their skill with earth jutsu. Shisui didn't even have to look to know his cousins had disappeared into their surroundings as well, his strike force becoming invisible in the forests they had spent years training and fighting in together.

Shisui continued towards the gathering point for the false army of rebels, all of his senses on high alert as he prepared for the ambush that was awaiting him. When he arrived in the clearing in the forest,

he perched in a branch at the edge of the treeline and gazed down at the group of shinobi below him.

A couple dozen men and women dressed in the battle attire of the Sound Village, Orochimaru's stolen country, gazed back up at him, their expressions hidden behind face masks but their roiling chakra betraying their bloodlust. At the head of the group stood a silver haired man with round glasses, a wide smile spread across his lips as if he had been waiting for him.

"Shisui Uchiha," the stranger greeted with a dramatic flair before his expression turned taunting, "Or should I call you Shisui the Teleporter?"

"You know my name but I don't seem to recognize you," Shisui returned, his eyes snapping across the scene before him with lightning speed.

"Ah, my *sincerest* apologies then! You can call me Kabuto although that won't really matter soon," Kabuto answered darkly, "I've heard quite a lot about you, Shisui."

"And yet you still choose to try to attack us? A poor decision."

"I suppose we'll see about that... Hmm..." Kabuto leaned far to the side, as if to peer around Shisui, with a pensive expression. "I don't suppose Sasuke is with you, is he?"

Shisui's heart dropped into his stomach but he refused to allow his anxiety to show.

“And what do you want with Sasuke?” he asked calmly, hoping to gain whatever information he could before the battle began.

“So that’s a no then? What a shame. I had hoped to lure out Sasuke to bring him back with me to please Lord Orochimaru,” the silver haired man sighed dramatically, shaking his head and tutting before his sharp gaze returned to Shisui, “But I suppose he may be satisfied with bringing back the most powerful sharingan in the world instead. He could use your legendary genjutsu to have Sasuke come to us willingly. I could even implant your sharingan into Sasuke’s body if his sharingan is not to my lord’s liking.”

Shisui scowled deeply, his disgust finally leaking through his carefully neutral expression. Fury rushed through him at the thought that this man would dare try to kidnap his young cousin. The fact he was so blasé as he spoke about trading around body parts made him sick, as if he could mix and match bits of corpses to please his master.

“We’re not dolls, you maniac. You can’t just switch our body parts around how you see fit!” Shisui growled, a hidden kunai slipping into his palm unseen as he prepared for battle.

“Oh, but *I can*,” a maniacal smile spreads across Kabuto’s lips as he dropped into an offensive stance like a snake coiling to strike, “Would you like to see?”

Before another word was spoken, the ground beneath the sound ninja exploded upwards, Shisui’s Inuzuka teammate and her companion mounting their sneak attack. The ninja who leapt to the side to dodge the teeth and blades of the earth jutsu users were soon caught in either the genjutsu or the flames that Shisui’s family was famous for.

Shisui himself lurched forward with a great burst of speed, descending upon the smirking silver haired man with the intent to protect his

young cousin at any cost.

He would never allow anyone to lay a hand on Sasuke.

“I can’t believe him! He’s such a jerk! It’s been three whole years and the day he finally comes back, he doesn’t even bother to say hi to his best friends!?” Naruto loudly complained, his hands fists at his sides and his expression pinched in discontent.

“I’m sure he has his reasons, Naruto,” Sakura sighed as they continued their search for their teammate, neither having been able to find him since they heard of Sasuke’s arrival back in the village that morning, “You know how he can be.”

“That’s no excuse for being rude! And now he’s *hiding* from us! We’ve been looking all day and he still hasn’t shown up!” the blond returned with a disgruntled pout before making a hard right and stomping down an alleyway they had traveled down three times just in the past hour.

Sakura followed after Naruto anyways, her expression pensive.

“Somehow I don’t think it’s us he’s hiding from...” she paused, stopping in her tracks as her mind worked. Naruto made it a few steps ahead of her before noticing she wasn’t following, the blond turning around the face her with a curious expression.

She hummed thoughtfully before her gaze returned to her teammate. “Come on, Naruto. I think I know where he might be.”

“Finally! A good lead! Well, let’s go then!” Naruto declared with a wide grin before shooting off in the opposite direction Sakura planned to take.

She shook her head in exasperation, turning on her heel and calmly walking in the direction where she thought her missing friend might be. She was only halfway through her walk when Naruto finally caught up to her, having finally realized he didn’t know where he was going.

When Sakura arrived at Training Ground Three, Naruto was already rushing forward to where the three posts from their genin days still stood.

“He’s not here, Sakura!” the blond declared with a frown.

“Not there, keep going. Follow me,” Sakura replied simply without breaking her stride, continuing into the thick forest that surrounded the training grounds.

Naruto followed loyally behind, the two shinobi trekking through the underbrush. They followed the lakeshore until they came across a small clearing in the otherwise dense forest. At the edge of the hidden meadow grew a towering oak and, beneath its thick branches, sat Sasuke. The Uchiha leaned back against the thick trunk of the ancient tree, the scowl marring his features visible even while hidden in the shade of the oak’s branches. He stared out at the lake, watching as the sun slowly made its descent from the sky.

Sakura had a feeling that her friend would be here, secreted away in one of his hideaways in the village. She was unable to smile at her success at having found him, however, when concern over his furious

expression dominated her thoughts.

Something had happened.

“There you are, you asshole! I can’t believe you would just ignore us like that!” Naruto berated as he strode forward to confront the Uchiha, heedless of the Uchiha’s agitation.

“Shut up, you idiot!” Sasuke growled back, his chakra roiling and his expression furious, “Why would I want to see someone like you anyways?!”

“Because we’re best friends! What’s your problem?!” Naruto shot back, smart enough to stay a safe distance away from their friend even as he glared down at him.

“Nothing to do with you. Get away from me,” he snarled, his sharingan bright eyes snapping back to the lake in front of him.

Sakura cautiously walked over to stand next to Naruto, her eyebrows furrowing in concern as she gazed at her livid teammate. While he appeared furious, it was the tightness in his expression that betrayed he was more hurt than angry. When she made this realization, and knowing what the usual cause of Sasuke’s upset was, she made an educated guess.

“What happened with your dad, Sasuke?” she asked, noticing how he flinched at her words.

“It’s none of your damn business with you being an *outsider*,” Sasuke grumbled, purposefully looking farther across the lake to avoid her

knowing gaze.

Sakura frowned deeply before perching a hand on her hip. “You’re family to me, Sasuke, so of course it’s my business. When you’re hurt, I hurt too. We both do. Even if it’s been years, you’re still my brother and I still care about you.”

Sasuke tensed as he spat, “Get lost. I never wanted you to be my family! And you’re an *idiot* if you think I still give a damn about you after all these years.”

Sakura’s eyebrow twitched, the hand at her side forming a fist.

“You can’t talk to Sakura like that! You don’t even deserve her thinking of you as family since you’re such a-!” Naruto shot off before being interrupted by Sakura rocketing forward, her fist pulled back and her eyes alight with fury of her own.

Sasuke leapt to his feet with a speed that Sakura noticed had improved dramatically but the suddenness of her attack gave her the upper hand. He only had time to throw up his guard, intending on blocking her strike before leveling one of his own. With how long he had been gone and with him never bothering to write home, he was unprepared for her chakra fueled strike.

Sakura’s punch slammed into him with enough force to toss him into the open field but not enough to break bone as it normally would. Sasuke rolled with the blow, leaping to his feet as he was thrown back. He stared at her with wide eyes and parted lips, shock momentarily replacing anger in his expression.

Sakura stomped out into the open field with narrowed eyes and clenched fists. She knew what Sasuke needed at that moment. Years

may have passed and they both may have grown but she could tell he was the same old Sasuke.

And when Sasuke was angry, he needed to fight.

Sasuke's stunned expression finally faded, instead once again being replaced by a scowl. He rushed forward with an indistinct cry of rage and she shot forward to meet him in the center of the field.

They traded blows but, between her flawless evasion skills and his dramatically increased speed, they both dodged each others' strikes seamlessly. His punches and kicks were lightning fast and he moved with a grace that only came from a thousand fights. Her attacks were so charged with chakra that she generated shockwaves in the air and ground when she swung, disturbing his person and his footing and keeping him on his toes.

"Hey, hey, hey! What are you doing, guys!? Knock it off!" Naruto yelled anxiously, holding up his hands in a placating gesture as he tried to calm his friends.

Sasuke let loose a roar of frustration after being unable to land a single hit on Sakura, the Uchiha channeling a burst of chakra into his fist. Sakura shot backwards, on the defensive, as he released an unfamiliar lightning jutsu which spanned the field. Drawing on every lesson of evasion she had been given as Tsunade's apprentice, Sakura expertly dodged the arcs and bolts of lightning, narrowly avoiding his jutsu.

Naruto, however, was not so lucky. His entire body tensed as a bolt ran through him, seizing his muscles and forcing him to clench his teeth. When he was finally released, he dropped to his hands and knees, panting loudly as he struggled to regain control of his own trembling limbs.

The blond snarled deeply as he struggled to his feet, his murderous gaze pinned on Sasuke. Not even a moment later, he rushed into the battle with a belligerent cry of, “Sasuke, you bastaaard!”

In the quiet of his office, Itachi worked to sort through the reports given to him that morning. Even as he read through the stack of paperwork, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

He had been happy to see his little brother home sooner than expected, Itachi having greatly missed Sasuke's presence during the time he was gone. His little brother was the most precious person to him and having him away, even under Shisui's care, had been a struggle. He had gotten through knowing that he was becoming stronger under the tutelage of his chosen brother and that he was away from their oppressive father.

When Sasuke had shown up in his office three months before he had been expected back, Itachi had been thrilled but silently concerned. Why had Shisui sent him home early? Even if he had finished his training early, he would have kept him longer just to separate him from clan politics.

Even now, after hours of work, he couldn't shake the thought that something was wrong and the sensation irked at him.

Although his thoughts were occupied by his concerns and with his work, he still sensed and recognized the approaching chakra long before his visitor appeared in the center of his office.

“Itachi,” the brunette began immediately, her tone colored with

worry, as she removed the cat like mask from her face and secured it to her shoulder.

“What’s wrong, Izumi?” Itachi asked, concern building within him at the tone of the commander of the ANBU forces.

He tried to ignore the tightness in his chest as his anxiety grew even further.

“It’s Shisui. There was an ambush orchestrated by Orochimaru and Shisui was the only survivor. He was able to kill the leader of the assault, a medical ninja named Kabuto, but not before he was badly poisoned. He’s being treated at the palace but...” Izumi took a breath, her hands fisting at her sides as her expression contorted with her anguish, “They say he’s going to die...”

Itachi’s heart dropped into his stomach as he dropped the papers he had been working with onto the surface of his desk. He paused as he stared down at the words unseeingly, his mind immediately piecing together why Shisui had sent Sasuke home early.

He closed his eyes for a moment, silently thanking the man he considered a brother for protecting Sasuke.

“I understand. Thank you for coming to tell me yourself...” he thanked quietly as he slowly opened his eyes once again.

“What do you want to do? This is *Shisui* we’re talking about... We have to do *something*,” Izumi returned, raking her bangs out of her face in agitation.

“Bring me Lady Tsunade.”

Sakura panted loudly as she laid with her back flat against the grass. Her arms and legs were spread wide around her as she slowly cooled off from the fight, her chest heaving as she tried to catch her breath. Her muscles ached from the workout but the wounds she had received during the spar had long since healed, her medical ninjutsu so second nature that she now healed herself without even thinking of it.

Despite her exhaustion, she could confidently say that she was the winner of this all out brawl. After all...

Sakura looked over at her boys, both of the men burnt, bruised, and bleeding as they too laid flat on their backs in the grass.

She made it out of the fight in much better shape.

Sakura turned her attention to Sasuke and, when he turned to regard her, she gave him a purposeful look. He frowned before his attention turned back to the sky above him.

By the time he finally spoke, they had all already caught their breath.

“He didn’t even bat an eyelash with me being home... He even had the gall to say that Itachi would have been done with the training by now and that, if *he* had been the one to go through the training, he wouldn’t have come back *second best*,” Sasuke finally explained before he made a frustrated noise in the back of his throat, “I just left. I couldn’t even think straight, I don’t even care if he’s upset anymore...”

Naruto shot up onto his elbows before loudly asserting, “Your dad is an idiot and an asshole! If it was up to me, I’d-!”

Sakura interrupted him with a glare.

“I-I mean, I, er...”

“What Naruto is *trying* to say is that you aren’t Itachi, Sasuke. And constantly getting compared to him is messing with your head...” Sakura tried instead, her voice softening as she continued, “Your dad is cruel to not praise you for all your hard work and how far you’ve come, especially with you growing in a completely different way than your brother.”

She noticed as Sasuke’s interest perked, the only thing that told her he was still listening being the subtle tilt of his head in her direction.

Sakura continued onward. “You’re both two totally different people. Different personalities, different chakra natures, different learning styles... Comparing you two is like comparing an ume and a mikan. Sure, they’re both fruits but they both have their own qualities that make them special and delicious.”

The Uchiha was silent for another few heartbeats before he muttered, “Did you just call me a fruit?”

Sakura smiled, knowing that she had gotten through to him.

“Yes I did, you moron. But are you seeing where I’m coming from? I

may be an outsider, but being an outsider gives me a better view on what's happening."

He nodded minutely before humming under his breath. "Well... Do you think I'm an ume or a mikan?"

She huffed out a laugh. "You're an ume, of course. Ume's are my favorite."

Sasuke finally tore his eyes away from the sky to regard her, the barest quirk at the edge of his lip. When he looked back to the clouds above, Sakura could sense how the darkness that had been surrounding him had lifted. The unease in her own heart lightened as her best friend finally returned to her.

"Hey, er... Sorry to interrupt but... Do you think you could maybe please heal us? Please?" Naruto asked, loosely gesturing to his oddly bent arm, "I uh... I think my arm might be broken."

"Since you asked so nicely," Sakura laughed as she finally sat up, wiping the dry grass from the backs of her thighs as she stood.

Before she could reach the blond to investigate his obviously broken arm, a masked ANBU with hair as black as ink appeared before them. Sasuke shot up, unwilling to be in such a sensitive position in front of a stranger, as he glared at the unwelcome intruder.

"Miss Haruno. Lord Hokage requests your presence. You're needed for a mission," the man explained curtly, his emotionless tone betraying nothing.

“Ah, understood. I’ll be there shortly,” Sakura returned with a nod, watching as the man disappeared without a trace.

She sighed as she turned back to her boys. “Sorry guys. Looks like I have to go... Just head on over to the hospital and they’ll take care of those wounds, okay?”

“Er... Ah, sure... Sakura...” Naruto muttered in response, his growing anxiety visible in his expression.

Even Sasuke grimaced, neither of her boys comfortable with anyone but her healing them even after all these years. She wondered how Sasuke even made it the past three years and hoped the doctors and nurses at the palace hadn’t been too traumatized by the uncooperative Uchiha.

“If I get back and find out you two waited until I was done with my mission for me to heal you, I’m going to break both of your legs,” Sakura threatened, both Naruto and Sasuke giving each other a wide eyed look

“Of course, Sakura! We wouldn’t dream of not going! Right, Sasuke?” Naruto chuckled nervously before shooting Sasuke a subtle but desperate look.

“Hn...” Sasuke muttered, looking off to the side instead of meeting either of their gazes.

Sakura’s eyes narrowed before she turned away from her boys, knowing that the two would make their way to the hospital in a day or two. If not for her threat then so they could fight each other again sooner.

Without another word, she began her run to the Hokage's office.

The moment that the ANBU operative's conjured ink bird touched down on the outskirts of the Fire Palace, he and Sakura were surrounded by the Royal Guard.

Sakura leapt down from the back of the construct and was immediately met with a middle aged Uchiha kunoichi dressed in a uniform which suggested she held a high ranking in the Royal Guard.

"Lady Sakura," the woman greeted formally and with a respect that surprised the young kunoichi, "If you'll come with me, I'll take you to our captain."

"Of course. Please lead the way," she replied with a nod.

Sakura stayed close to her guide's side as she was lead through a massive wooden gate and into the capital city. The woman moved quickly and, despite how she carefully concealed her emotions behind a hardened expression, Sakura could tell by the rigidity in her form and her haste that she was concerned.

Based on the silent anxiety of the guard and the report she received from Lady Tsunade and the Fifth Hokage, she was grateful that she was able to get out to the palace so quickly. Even if it had been at the cost of dealing with that insufferable ANBU operative who had taken her there. She couldn't stand the man with his sickeningly saccharine tone and his horrible nickname for her: "Ugly".

At least his ink bird had been helpful, the trip having been cut down by nearly a day thanks to his assistance.

The Uchiha was quick to lead her to the palace's personal hospital, the building being considerably smaller than the hospital that Sakura was used to working at although it was far more lavish. Finely manicured topiaries and ornamental fountains decorated the front of the three story facility. The pathway which wound towards the double doors leading into the hospital was crafted with stone bricks in a number of colors which formed complex geometric patterns. Even the wooden banister which bordered the pathway she walked down was intricately carved into the shapes of roots and leaves.

The unnecessary show of wealth made Sakura uneasy and she prayed that the Daimyo had set aside enough funding to properly outfit the hospital and the staff as opposed to just decorating the building.

Inside, she found that the facility seemed to be as well funded internally as it was externally. A number of civilian doctors and nurses flitted about between the rooms, comforting Sakura with the familiarity of the activity.

She knew that this facility tended to the royal family, the Royal Guard, and the civilians in the city but, while she didn't doubt their skill, she knew they would be unprepared for such a severe poisoning as the one that had befallen Shisui Uchiha. It was unlikely anyone even in Konoha would be prepared for a poisoning as severe as she had been told of besides her, Shizune, and Lady Tsunade herself.

As her guide came to a stop in front of a closed patient room, Sakura cleared her mind, pushing away all the unimportant thoughts to instead focus on her future patient. Nodding to the elder woman in thanks, she took a silent breath before opening the door to the occupied room.

To be greeted by a flurry of activity.

A handful of nurses and doctors worked together to tend to an unconscious, dark haired man. The sheer number of nurses and doctors working in unison was a poor sign to Sakura, the medical ninja knowing that this man must be in critical condition to demand the attention of so many healthcare workers.

“Thank you for taking care of Shisui Uchiha, everyone, I appreciate all of your hard work. My name is Sakura Haruno and I’ve been dispatched from Konoha by my mentor Lady Tsunade. I’ll be your relief but I will need some help from a few of you while I tend to him,” Sakura introduced quickly, already stepping between the parting crowd of healthcare professionals to investigate her patient.

Her observant gaze snapped across the Uchiha, taking in his current state. He appeared to be unconscious, the prodding of the nurses and doctors not phasing him. His skin was covered in a sheen of sweat, his damp hair hanging wildly around his unnaturally pale face. His bare chest rose and fell at an uneven rate, his dry and cracked lips parted with his labored breathing.

“Of course, Lady Sakura,” one of the doctors answered in a relieved tone, the salt and pepper haired man stepping aside to make room for the medical ninja, “If there’s anything you need to take care of Sir Uchiha, please let us know.”

“Thank you,” Sakura returned as she began her diagnostic on her patient, her hands glowing an ethereal green.

The group of civilians looked on with varying degrees of emotion, some with open curiosity, some with a familiar neutrality, and some with outright disdain. The kunoichi paid them no mind, her attention focused on her patient.

As she ran her diagnostic, she began to become even more concerned. The Uchiha didn't stir in the slightest, an alarming occurrence since every high level shinobi always instinctually reacted to her invading chakra, no matter how benevolent. As she carefully interpreted the return of her own chakra, it became apparent as to why he was so unphased: his poisoning had progressed so far that he had slipped into a coma.

If she didn't act soon, this man would die.

"I need an empty basin as well as one filled with clean water immediately!" she instructed, the severity of the situation dawning on her as she withdrew her chakra.

The group in the room rapidly dispersed, a silent panic in the air at Sakura's tone. Only two people returned, a male and a female nurse with an empty basin and one filled with water in hand. Sakura nodded her thanks as the nurses set the basins on the bedside table and stepped back to give the kunoichi her space.

She formed a chakra scalpel in her hand as she slipped the blanket farther down her patient's bare chest. She briefly noted the presence of a bandage decorated with the kanji for soulmark secured to the man's chest, a special sealed bandage which could only be removed by the patient themselves. The bandages were a common sight in the hospital, a practice used to conceal soulmarks and to prevent healthcare workers and visitors from spying on the patient's mark during their care. Ignoring the bandage and working as quickly and carefully as she could, she made an incision in his side, the Uchiha not even flinching in his comatose state.

Sakura dispersed the chakra blade before gathering a ball of clean water in her hands. She positioned one hand on her patient's opposite side as she pressed the water through the incision she had made, using

her chakra to meticulously guide the fluid through his tissues and gather the poison. Even as she worked to cleanse the toxin from his body in a way she knew was agonizing, her patient didn't react. The only sign that he felt anything at all was his fingertips twitching.

When water that leached through his flesh and into her opposite hand came back as black as pitch, so laden with poison that the acrid scent of it filled the room, Sakura realized how severe his condition truly was. The nurses both gagged at the foul stench of the poison, even Sakura herself grimacing at the odor. She deposited the toxin into the empty bowl, the fluid so thick and viscous that it acted more like tar than a liquid.

Gathering another ball of water in her hand, Sakura cleared her mind and hardened her resolve. She would not let this man die.

She would never let *anyone* die.

Sakura ignored the odd burning in the crook of her thigh as she pushed forward through the procedure.

Sakura was exhausted.

She had spent hours the previous night removing every last trace of poison from her comatose patient and repairing as much damage as she could. Even with her efforts, the Uchiha had yet to wake up although his vital signs had finally evened out. His breathing was calm, his heart rate was stable, and his pulse was strong.

For the entire night following her emergency surgery, she had crafted

an antidote. Using some of the sludge like poison that she had extracted from her patient, she had created an antidote which would destroy whatever poison lingered in his body.

She was grateful for the advanced technology that she had available to her at the palace's hospital even if the lack of sleep left her eyes and her mind feeling gritty. Refusing to allow her exhaustion to affect her work, she pushed through the fog and continued onwards.

Sakura entered her patient's room with a gentle knock on his door, a show of respect even if he was still unconscious. With a syringe filled with her antidote and a clipboard with his chart in hand, she walked up to his bed. She took note of his calm and stable state and how he continued to grow stronger with each trip into his room, the medic silently impressed with the resilience inherent to all Uchiha.

Grasping the injection port to the IV bag hooked up to his arm, she popped the cap off of the syringe containing her antidote and carefully pressed the needle into the port. She infused the medication into the bag of rapidly draining saline, curiously watching as the magenta medication mixed with the saline and gave the liquid a strange pink hue.

Humming in amusement to herself, she shook her head with a smile. She felt incredibly proud of herself for what she had accomplished, and by herself no less. She had saved the life of a man at death's door. Not only that, but she had made a difference in the lives of all those who loved the Uchiha, she had helped Sasuke, the Hokage Itachi, and the ANBU commander Izumi as well. Shisui would pull through now, despite all he had suffered through, because of her. She had made good on her promise once again.

Sakura wondered if her soulmate would be proud of her if he saw her now.

She lifted her clipboard to check his previous vitals, her eyes flitting across the paper. When she turned to face her patient to check his pulse and blood pressure before she left to allow the medication to infuse, she was shocked to see he was awake.

She jumped when she saw his bleary but open eyes fixated on her, his confused gaze focused onto her face with an intensity she was unaccustomed to with her critical patients. She opened her mouth to stammer out a startled greeting but, before she could utter a word, she was surprised by her patient shakily reaching up towards her hair.

“I didn't know angels had pink hair,” Shisui whispered with a smile as he brushed his fingertips across her pink locks.

Sakura stopped breathing.

She watched as Shisui slipped back into unconsciousness with fluttering eyelashes, his hand limply falling back to his side. With a whimper, she stumbled backwards, dropping the clipboard in her hands. The wooden board hit the tile floor with a harsh clatter and a rustle of papers but neither her or her once again unconscious patient flinched.

No, not a patient...

Her soulmate.

Sakura took a couple more steps backwards, her heart suddenly racing in her chest, before she flipped around and strode out of the room. She shoved open his door, her hands trembling, as she resisted the urge to run. She needed to get away, she needed to think, she needed to be alone.

She needed to hide. She couldn't let her patients, the nurses, and the doctors see her like this.

Her gut churned dangerously as she struggled to calmly walk to the empty nurse's break room, passing by rooms filled with resting patients. She rushed inside the rarely used room, shutting the door behind her with a gentle click and slumping back against the wood. Drawing in a stuttering breath of air, she slowly slid to the floor, her mind racing.

She had always thought of her soulmate in the back of her mind. She had always wondered when she would meet him, what he would be like, and whether he would be proud of all she had accomplished. She had fantasized about the first time she would meet him ever sense she had first read the words printed along the crook of her thigh but...

Sakura never thought she'd meet him in a way that felt so sudden. So *wrong*.

For gods sake, she was only sixteen! And Shisui was... he was a grown man, already well into his twenties.

She had finally come into her own, she had finally begun to become a kunoichi, a person, who she could begin to be proud of. She was finally starting to make her way and growing into a woman who could stand on her own. She had finally begun to leave the girl she had once been behind.

While she still worked to shake off the last vestiges of her childhood, Shisui had long since become a man. He was almost a decade older than her! He counted men and women like Kakashi-sensei and Kurenai-sensei as his equals, not his superiors. He was the commander

of the Royal Guard, the Fifth Hokage's best friend, and Sasuke's own mentor. He was famous as one of the most powerful and prestigious shinobi in Konoha...

Sakura had always dreamed that her soulmate would be someone who could grow with her, who would stand on even ground with her, and who would respect her as their equal. She had dozens of fantasies all of which tied her and her soulmate together in a neat little bow. It wasn't supposed to happen like *this*. It wasn't supposed to be complicated like this...

Meeting her soulmate was supposed to be perfect, it was supposed to be beautiful, it was supposed to be everything she had dreamed of as a little girl. It wasn't supposed to feel... wrong.

Shisui wouldn't even remember what he had said to her... He would never remember his first words to her, the words that had been printed in the crook of her thigh since she was born. Half of the moment they were supposed to treasure for their entire lives was forever lost to him.

Would he even believe her? She could speak his soulmark but he could say she was trying to trick him, that she had sussed out his mark to steal him away from his true soulmate. He would never have the proof of speaking her soulmark himself and he could reject her as his mate entirely...

Was he even her soulmate for certain? There was a chance that this was simply a coincidence, that another person, her real soulmate, would utter that phrase to her... It was a rare phrase, certainly, but maybe someone else would say it to her? Maybe she was just mistaken? Maybe she had heard his mumbling wrong in her sleep deprived state? Maybe...

Sakura dropped her face into her hands, heat building in her eyes. She had been so grateful when the gods had given her soulmate back to her following his death... She had been so excited to see him, to meet him, to learn who he was and to share everything about herself with him. She couldn't wait to finally hear those words and be united with the one who would share his life with her, who would always love her, who was made for her.

But in that moment, all she felt was fear. She was too young. It was too soon. It wasn't supposed to happen like this, she didn't even know if Shisui was a good person. She couldn't face him like this, she couldn't bare to hear whatever it was he would say to her... Whether he would accept her, whether he would respect her, whether he'd want her as his lover, whether he would try to force her to sleep with him, whether he'd reject her completely...

She wasn't ready.

Sakura's eyes slid open as she took a shaky breath. She forced herself to focus, gathering her scattered and frightened thoughts into a neat ball of dread which she forced down. She refused to allow herself to fall apart. She couldn't allow herself to cry like a child, to become as weak as she had once been.

She was a medical ninja now and she was Lady Tsunade's apprentice. She needed to be a professional. She needed to do what was right for her patient, soulmate or not, and she couldn't take care of Shisui like this. Not with such a tie between them.

She needed to get ahold of Lady Tsunade.

A single tear slipped free from Sakura's careful control and, as she quickly brushed it away, she dragged herself to her feet. Steeling her resolve and shoving aside her emotions, she smoothly opened the door

to the nurse's lounge and stepped outside. As calmly as she could manage while fighting to shove down the storm within her, she left to find the nearest member of the Royal Guard to take her to the aviary.

She was lucky to come across a young Yamanaka guard lingering at the crowded nurses station, his own anxiety obvious as he shifted from foot to foot while he watched the half dozen nurses work. She watched as he raised his hand to address one of the nurses who worked with Sakura on Shisui's case and as he was shot down by a harsh look from the exasperated older woman.

When Sakura approached him, the Yamanaka's face lit up with a hopeful smile.

"Lady Sakura! It's very good to see you! How, uh... how is Commander Shisui doing? Is he going to be okay? No one will tell me anything even though I keep asking..." he asked, apprehension coloring his tone as his eyes not so subtly flicked across her expression.

"He's fine, I promise. He's recovering now," Sakura comforted, the Yamanaka's expression morphing into one of relief, before she cleared the knot building in her throat, "I do need to make a brief stop at the aviary though before I clock out for the night. I need to get ahold of Lady Tsunade because I-I need to get ahold of my relief. I'm needed back in the village for my expertise."

"Of course, Lady Sakura! I would expect nothing less from the medical ninja who saved Commander Shisui's life. I can only imagine how in demand you must be for your talents," he crowed, perching his fists on his hips confidently, "Please, I would be honored in you would allow me to take you!"

Sakura nodded simply before trailing after her new guide, grateful

that the man seemed happy to fill the quiet of the trip with his own words and either failed to notice or was careful to ignore her silence. As they traveled the short distance to the aviary, he regaled her with tales of his commander's, her soulmate's, valor and kindness. How he respected the Uchiha as a shinobi, as his captain, and as a person. How he was incredibly grateful for her helping a *man* he not only admired but considered a friend.

As Sakura listened to the guard's stories of his respect for Shisui and how good of a person he was, she couldn't help but feel more conflicted. She simply nodded along and only spoke when it was needed, lost to her thoughts.

When the Yamanaka finally brought her to the aviary and after she was given access to one of the falcons that traveled to and from Konoha, she hastily scrawled out a note to her master. She rapidly explained what had happened, how she desperately needed to keep the identity of her soulmate a secret, and how she needed to switch places with Shizune so the Uchiha could have the unbiased medical attention he needed. Without a doubt in her heart, she knew Lady Tsunade would understand.

As Sakura watched the falcon fly into the horizon, the rising sun painting the sky shades of purple, she felt her tears threaten to return.

Why did it have to be like this?

Chapter End Notes

Ume are plums and pickled ume are one of Sakura's favorite foods (and why she said Sasuke was like an ume and was her favorite). Mikan are a kind of citrus fruit that are known for being very easy to peel. Sort of like Cuties for us Americans.

Edit: I've gotten a number of reviewers asking about why Sakura "overreacted" after finding out that Shisui was her soulmate and I

thought I'd address it here. Sakura's fears can be boiled down to one MAIN concern: She's only sixteen years old and Shisui is well into his twenties at twenty-four. That's eight years, a massive age difference for someone as young as Sakura. She's still a teen, still a minor and still very young, and just found out that her soulmate is a much, much older man. A man close to the same age as her old sensei (Kakashi was twenty-nine during the beginning of Shippuden) and a shinobi who is incredibly prestigious to boot. The prospect of a romantic/sexual relationship with a grown man can be absolutely terrifying for a young girl, ninja or not.

There are a number of people who have had personal experiences where there were mentally and emotionally ready for a romantic relationship with a much older partner when they were in their teens and this is in no way an attack on them. Rather, these are the thoughts and reactions of a young girl who is in no way ready for such a leap.

Shisui's Soulmark

Chapter Notes

A little more than five years have passed between this chapter and the previous. Sakura recently turned 22, Sasuke and Naruto are still 21, Shisui is 30, and Itachi is 26. (I did a chart with all of their birthdays so it would be more accurate.) I envision, now that Sakura is in her twenties, that her clothes have changed from her Shippuden attire to her battle gear and her casual outfit from The Last movie. Say what you want about the movie, I like her outfits in it. Also, an engawa is sort of like a wrap around porch that encompasses the outside of some Japanese homes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sakura flitted across the rooftops of Konoha, her footsteps against the roofs of the homes and businesses she traveled across silent. She easily shot from building to building, darted through darkened alleyways, and navigated the maze of electrical wires with the ease of a ninja who had lived in the village their entire life. Following out the summons she had been given to report to the Hokage for a mission, she traveled along the quickest, and the most familiar, route between her apartment and the Hokage Tower.

The spring sunlight shone down upon her, warming her skin and her clothes and contrasting sweetly with the cool air rushing over her as she ran. While this run had long since failed to tire her, her breath and her heart even, the familiarity of the run to the Hokage's office was one that always brought her a sense of comfort. Looking out across the village and admiring the chaotic beauty of Konoha was a small pleasure she enjoyed during trips such as these.

Whenever Sakura looked out at her home like this, the full view of the city from above disappearing as she bolted between wildly colored buildings only to reappear when she emerged back onto the rooftops, she was reminded of how far everyone had come. Of how much the people she loved, and how much she herself, had grown.

During the five years since Sasuke had finally returned from his training at the capital city and Naruto had returned from his training with Master Jiraiya, the reunited Team Seven had all grown into ninja, and people, who they could all say they were proud of. They had certainly suffered and experienced loss over the years, they had all had their fair share of tragedies, but looking back on it all, they had overcome so beautifully.

Sakura was so proud of her boys, her brothers. They had both become men that she not only cherished and loved but that she respected and trusted with her life.

Naruto... Naruto had always been a unique individual, one of a kind even among those who were one of a kind. Finally a man, however, he had become astounding.

The blond and his soulmate Hinata had tied the knot just a few short days after her eighteenth birthday, finally sealing their bond with more than just the marks on their skin. Over the past three years, they had lead the Hyuga clan into a new age. True to the promise that Naruto had made to Neji during the Chunin Exams, Naruto and Hinata had worked together to finally abolish the main and the branch houses. Instead of the Hyuga clan being a pact between masters and servants, they had become a true family with Hinata and Neji at it's head.

Even more than that, Naruto's baffling ability to befriend those around him had taken a shocking turn just two short years previous. After nineteen years of compassion and perseverance, he had finally earned the respect and the friendship of the being sealed within him. A being that Sakura and Sasuke had learned was named Kurama when the blond had both unleashed him and revealed his Nine Tails Mode during a mission they had been sent on together.

Even while facing off against dozens of cultists who worshiped the death god Jashin, and even while struggling to maintain her

composure with the cultists' leader Hidan barking vile remarks about her body, Sakura had been amazed by the sheer power that Naruto and Kurama wielded together. Itachi had been less pleased with the devastation the three of them had left behind as they annihilated the Jashinists and freed their sacrifices but even the beration they received upon returning home could not dull the sense of amazement that remained upon finally meeting Kurama.

With Naruto and Kurama finally working together, they had earned a place as one of the most powerful ninja in the five nations and as two of the most cherished members of their village.

Sasuke had grown up in his own way but in a way that made Sakura no less proud. Finally abandoning his fruitless goal to earn the respect and praise of his abusive father, Sasuke had instead broken away to find his own path in life. A path which had lead to him becoming an ANBU captain and one of the most skilled shinobi in the village.

Or rather, one of the most skilled shinobi *outside* of the village.

While Sasuke held the title of captain, he most frequently worked by himself on solo missions from the Hokage himself. His solitary travels had earned him the title of Wandering Ninja while his incredible successes on his classified missions, as well as his not so classified victories against outrageously powerful opponents, had earned him a place in the S-ranked section of the Bingo Book.

It was only due to Sasuke's implicit faith in Sakura and Naruto that he had told them of his battle against a Leaf missing ninja and one of the Legendary Sannin, Orochimaru. How, during their fight which had left the sannin dead, Sasuke had learned of a small yet devastatingly powerful group of terrorists known as the Akatsuki. Information which had lead to his current long standing mission to destroy the group and one which kept him out of the village.

Despite him seemingly never being home, Sakura knew that the man she considered a brother enjoyed being outside of the village for his mission. Despite him never speaking of it, she could tell by his actions that he was deeply depressed by the fact he had yet to meet his soulmate. She could see it in the tightness in his eyes and the slope of his shoulders whenever they visited Naruto and Hinata's happy home.

She suspected that he was so partial to his lone travels because he believed they would one day lead him to the woman who would tell him the words printed across his shoulder blade. "Just because you're the most gorgeous man I've ever met doesn't mean I won't kick your ass".

Sakura could not wait for Sasuke to finally bring his soulmate home. Not only did she want to see Sasuke happy but she was itching to hear the story of how he would meet the woman who would both compliment and threaten him in the same breath. Selfishly, however, she just prayed he would find her soon so she could see her brother more often than a couple times a year.

Not only was Sakura proud of her brothers for their growth but she was proud of herself for everything she had accomplished as well. After years of training, she had finally surpassed her master, Lady Tsunade. She had finally filled her Strength of a Hundred seal when she was just seventeen years old but she had done much more than just master her teacher's jutsu. She had proved herself to the ninja world and to herself.

During a routine mission to Suna to collect rare medicinal herbs, Sakura had been caught up in an assault by the Sand Village's most powerful and most notorious missing ninja: Sasori of the Red Sands. The man, if one could even call the puppet master such, had infiltrated the village in order to abduct the Kazekage to add to his puppet collection. Upon being discovered, he had laid siege to the city with his hundred puppets, attempting a massacre of not only Suna's fighting force of ninja but of the civilian population as well.

Flung into a sudden invasion, Sakura had proven her skill as a healer by saving the lives of hundreds of Suna citizens. By utilizing her Strength of a Hundred seal and summoning Katsuyu, she had been able to perform their Immense Healing Network technique and save the lives of shinobi and civilians alike.

What was more, she had proved herself as an S-rank ninja by simultaneously fighting and defeating Sasori after he had crippled the Kazekage Gaara with a deadly poison. She had earned her place as the most skilled healer and the most powerful kunoichi in all five nations, surpassing even her master, and she was proud of how her actions had resulted in an even closer bond between Konoha and Suna.

Although she still wasn't sure how to feel about her unusual yet cherished friendship with Gaara after she had saved his life a second time by curing him of his poisoning. She certainly couldn't find it in her to complain, especially with her cute little garden of gifted succulents that Gaara added to with every one of his visits.

Sakura was proud of herself for everything she had done, for all of her accomplishments over the years. Finally, she felt as if she had grown into the woman she was meant to be. She now stood on her own two feet and, not just that, she could help others stand on theirs.

No matter how proud she was, however, a secret weight always hung over her head. Thoughts of her experience with Shisui Uchiha following his poisoning remained a heavy weight on her shoulders. For over five years, she had kept her secret, never once seeing him again following her departure from the capital city.

For all these years, Sakura had tried to convince herself that Shisui wasn't her soulmate. After all, the phrase written across the crook of her inner thigh could be uttered by another one day. It was a common enough phrase, an easy flirt for a woman with her unique hair color. It was highly likely that she could hear it again one day from someone else. Someone who actually was her soulmate. After her finally

becoming a woman she was proud of, she knew she was actually ready.

Part of her wondered if she should go speak to him to dispel the nagging worry in the back of her mind. Just to make sure that he wasn't her soulmate for certain. No matter what she did, however, she could never bring herself to travel to the capital city to meet him and see. To face him once and for all after having turned her back on him.

She never utilized Sasuke's offer to travel with him and to meet his family members who served in the Royal Guard, she avoided missions that would take her to the Fire Palace, and she didn't dare go by herself. She was terrified of what truth she would find there and what it would mean for her. Sakura wondered if it was for the best; if sating her curiosity and finally finding her answer was even worth it.

After all, if Shisui was her soulmate, how would she ever explain to him how she had ran away and abandoned him for five years?

With the familiar red paint of the Academy coming into view, Sakura forced that skeleton back into the closet where it belonged. She didn't have the time to think about something like that. She was a kunoichi of Konoha and she had a mission to do. Regrets from the past could come later.

Entering through the front door of the Academy like any respectful shinobi, Sakura ascended the staircase leading to the highest floor where the Hokage's office had remained since it's construction. Knocking on the door to office, she was beckoned within by Itachi's familiar voice. Entering through the heavy wooden door, she felt the familiar sensation of the sound canceling genjutsu wash over her before she came to stand before the Hokage's desk. Izumi, the commander of the ANBU forces, stood at Itachi's side.

While the Uchiha woman was warm hearted and respectful, always greeting Sakura with a kind smile and kinder words, her presence alone was enough to alert Sakura to the severity of the mission she was to be sent on. Sakura had worked with the ANBU numerous times in the past, her skills as the most skilled medical ninja and kunoichi in the five nations making her a valuable addition to any mission. The missions that she had found herself taking part in while working with the ANBU in the past had always been challenging, well paying, and mind bogglingly dangerous.

“Lady Sakura, it’s good to see you once again,” Izumi greeted with a warm smile, drawing a returning smile from the younger kunoichi before her.

“Thank you for coming,” Itachi spoke next with a nod from his place sitting behind his desk.

“Of course. I’m happy to be of help,” Sakura replied, “What should I expect on this mission?”

“Your medical skills are needed once again. Someone has breached the Iron Walls of the Fire Temple and has abducted the head monk Chiriku,” the Fifth Hokage began, Sakura’s eyes widening in surprise at hearing the supposedly impenetrable defensive walls of the Fire Temple had been overcome, “We have reason to believe it may be a member of an organization called the Akatsuki. Sasuke has been trailing the organization for years but, at the moment, he is following a lead which could result in locating the leaders of this group. With the suspect possibly being a member of the Akatsuki, and with the fact that Chiriku could very likely be severely injured, we have decided to send out you and a squadron of ANBU to rescue him.”

“Of course, I’m more than happy to help,” Sakura agreed before asking, “Who will I be working with on this assignment?”

“That’s where I come in,” Izumi began as she took a step forward, “I have chosen a very specific team for this mission, a number of whom are already familiar with both you and your fighting style.”

With a purposeful wave of her hand, three masked ANBU appeared at her sides. The Uchiha commander smiled meaningfully before adding, “Although I’m certain that you already know their identities, I ask that you follow protocol either way.”

“Of course, ma’am,” Sakura answered, her eyes flicking across the three ANBU before her and immediately recognizing them all: the village’s only wood style user Yamato, the silent yet skilled kunoichi Yugao, and that asshole Sai.

“And who will be the leader of the squad for the mission?” Sakura continued, her gaze flicking back to Izumi.

Izumi's eyes snapped upwards, as if recognizing a familiar sensation, before she shook her head in amusement.

“Of course he's late,” she chuckled under her breath, even Itachi cracking a smile as they both looked to the opening door.

“Sorry it took me so long to get here! I ran into a bit of, er, trouble on the roads,” a frighteningly familiar voice called out, making Sakura’s breath stop in her chest. No matter how many years it had been, and no matter how few words he had spoken, she could never forget the sound of his voice.

Shisui Uchiha.

“Trouble, you say?” Izumi laughed, perching a hand on her hip as she sent the eldest Uchiha a stern look, “Should I send out a squad to collect whatever bandits you decided to round up along the way?”

“Ah, what can I say? Old habits die hard,” Shisui replied, shrugging, as he came forward to stand at Sakura’s side.

Even muscle in Sakura’s body tensed at being so close to the man who could be her soulmate. No, the man who she once thought could be her soulmate. He wasn’t supposed to be here, he was supposed to be at the Fire Palace! What was he doing here, back in Konoha? And what was he doing being assigned to her as her commanding officer?

Sakura felt as if her heart could stop beating from the panic rushing through her body. Unable to face him, her gaze locked onto the edge of Itachi’s desk, unwavering as the conversation continued around her.

“And you’re certain that you’re up for this? You did just return from your station at the Fire Palace,” Itachi questioned, concern for his clan mate in his tone.

“I’m just happy to be back home now that you finally found me a suitable replacement. Took you long enough, by the way,” Shisui sassed, eyeing Itachi before grinning, “It was getting pretty boring being stuck up in that tower at the Fire Palace.”

“Of course you would be upset about getting a cushy job in the capital city,” Izumi taunted.

“Hey, I almost died, I’ll have you know!” Shisui argued before muttering, “The only bit of excitement I got out there...”

As the Uchiha around her spoke, Sakura felt as the weight of Itachi's gaze fell upon her. Her eyes flicked up to the corner of his desk to meet his gaze but, when she saw understanding there, she quickly looked away. She wondered if Tsunade had revealed to their Hokage what had happened in the capital city all those years ago and, at that moment, she simply prayed that he would keep her secret if he had.

Izumi laughed, bringing Sakura's attention back to the conversation around her. "Well, I'm glad you've gotten so bored since we have a particularly dangerous mission for you today. Before I begin, however. Shisui, this is Lady Sakura. She will be serving as your medic for this mission."

"It's nice to meet you, Lady Sakura," Shisui greeted in a friendly tone, turning to face Sakura head on.

Sakura just nodded in response, biting her tongue hard enough to hurt to prevent herself from speaking. She could only bear to glance over at the man she had once tended to, while she silently prayed that no one could hear her racing heart as readily as she could hear it pounding in her ears.

"A little shy? That's fine, I understand. I heard about what you did in Suna, about how you saved the lives of all those people and the Kazekage himself. I'm glad to have you on the team," he continued forward anyways, reaching out to pat her on the shoulder.

When his hand touched the bare skin of her shoulder, Sakura felt as if she had been hit with a lightning jutsu. Every muscle in her body tensed up as if she had been struck by Sasuke's Kirin and all she could do in response was nod numbly.

Even when Shisui took his hand away, she could still feel his handprint against her skin like a brand. She refused to raise her wide

eyes from the corner of Itachi's desk and, throughout the rest of the briefing, she was unable to meet the eyes of anyone in the room. The only thing she could manage was to clench her teeth to keep from speaking a word.

For the days following the mission that Shisui had taken to rescue to head monk Chiriku from the Akatsuki bounty hunter Kakuzu, the Uchiha had been miffed. Even now, as he finished his grocery shopping and gathered the vegetables he would need to cook dinner that night, he couldn't shake his annoyance.

The mission itself had gone spectacularly well. If anything, his squad had been overkill. With both him, Yamato, Yugao, Sai, and Lady Sakura working together, the undead Akatsuki hadn't even stood a chance. If anything, their medic could have handled the situation all on her own with how readily she had discerned the importance of Kakuzu's hearts and how rapidly she had destroyed two of them. Shisui had felt more like a spectator than a captain during the entirety of the mission, especially when she had healed the grievously injured monk with astounding ease.

The more Shisui thought of the pink haired kunoichi, however, the more upset he became.

Throughout the entirety of the mission, she had refused to speak to him. She had spoken to all of the others so freely, talking to them all like old friends. Well... perhaps not their youngest member Sai. Shisui got the feeling that Sakura held little love for the artist. When it came to him, however, she had refused to speak a word.

Sakura had only interacted with him when absolutely necessary and any communication between them had been silent. She had avoided him like a leper during the entirety of their time together and he

couldn't help but feel personally slighted. He had been peeved by her outright rejection of him but he hadn't brought it up during the mission. If she didn't like him, that wasn't his problem. She did her job with astounding efficiency and her lack of communication with him hadn't negatively affected the mission in the slightest. He had no reason to complain.

No matter how hard Shisui tried though, he couldn't shake his irritation.

He was a good shinobi and a nice person! Sakura was best friends with his baby cousin for gods' sake, the young man he spent years training! They should have all kinds of stuff to talk about! He had so many embarrassing stories to regale her with about Sasuke. They would have been great friends if she had bothered to give him a chance...

Frowning to himself, Shisui paid for his produce, handing the stall owner a handful of coins. The elderly gentleman took the payment and, while he worked to count out his change, a flash of pink caught Shisui's eye.

Rapidly turning his head to follow the source of the burst of color, his sharp eyes immediately settled on the familiar form of Konoha's most renowned kunoichi. He watched her, somehow surprised to have come across her in the city they shared in the middle of one of the largest marketplaces in the village. Although he could admit that if it hadn't been for her uniquely colored hair, he wouldn't have recognized her in her long sleeved, sage green top and white pants.

As he watched Sakura peruse the stalls, the woman offering easy smiles to the vendors as her curious gaze flicking across the goods for sale, he realized that this would be the perfect opportunity to finally speak with her. He wanted to know why she had ignored him all throughout the mission and thought that now, while both of them were off duty, would be a good opportunity.

Abandoning the shopkeeper still counting out his change before Sakura could escape his line of sight and disappear into the crowds, Shisui took off after her. Ignoring the calls from the merchant saying he had forgotten his change, he continued onwards, clutching his paper bag of groceries to his chest as to not lose his purchases in his run.

“Lady Sakura!” Shisui called out, the pink haired woman turning around with a curious expression to find the source of her name.

Upon seeing him, however, her eyes widened and she immediately turned away. Pretending as if she hadn’t seen him at all, she bolted down a side road, her pink heels clicking on the concrete below her feet as she left.

“H-hey, wait!” he yelled, darting around shop patrons walking the streets as he chased after her, “I just want to talk! Wait up!”

Lowering her head, Sakura continued to ignore him as she sped down the less crowded side street. Frustration rose within him and, unwilling to play this ridiculous game anymore, he flash stepped in front of her. Smart enough to not reach out and grab the kunoichi, he instead held out a hand for her to stop.

“Lady Sakura,” Shisui began, taking a rapid step backwards when Sakura raised her fists in surprise, before quickly tacking on, “Wait wait wait! I just wanted to ask why you avoided talking to me that whole mission. Did I do something to upset you?”

Instead of speaking, she glared up at him, the weight of the venom behind her gaze surprising him. Why did she hate him so much? What was her problem?

When Sakura instead continued to walk forward, intending on pushing passed him, his control on his rising irritation snapped. Taking a step to the side, he blocked her path, his own agitation finally leaching through into his tone.

“Hey, I’m talking to you! At least show me some semblance of respect and give me an answer instead of just blowing me off!” he demanded, glaring down at her and ignoring the stares of the curious shopkeepers and patrons nearby.

Sakura glowered up at him, visibly biting her lip as if to refrain from speaking. Despite feeling how her chakra roiled dangerously around her, an indication of her own rising anger, he continued to stare down at her, silently demanding an answer. Not only had she been rude by refusing to speak to him, even going as far as to avoid looking at him on the mission as if something had been wrong with *him*, but now she was being outright disrespectful by blatantly blowing him off.

Shisui felt as if he deserved some sort of an answer for her outright hostility even if it was her yelling in his face on this city street.

When Sakura tried to skirt passed him once again, he took another step to the side, blocking her path yet again.

“What did I ever do to you to piss you off so bad?”

Shisui watched as Sakura’s temper finally hit the tipping point, the kunoichi releasing a furious growl as she glared up at him with fire in her gaze. Finally, she opened her mouth and spoke.

With her eyes snapping between different objects in her environment,

as if in an attempt to craft the most random and ridiculous phrase she possibly could in that moment, Sakura screamed at him, “Pants are not studying the green wheatgrass today, you *bastard!*”

Shisui stopped breathing.

He dropped his groceries, the paper bag hitting the ground with a thump and the vegetables he had bought for dinner that night spilling out into the street. He felt as if his heart had stopped in his chest as his mouth popped open in shock, unable to form words.

Without a thought, his sharingan spun to life, and, for a heartbeat, the world froze around him. The image of Sakura, her face contorted in fury as she glared up at him like a hated enemy, burned into his mind. His sharingan memorized every detail of the woman before him - her disheveled pink hair, the viridian of her eyes, the scowl on her lips - forming an unforgettable memory of the moment that the words on his chest had finally been spoken.

Those stupid, random, *ridiculous* words that had been printed on his chest for twenty-two years had finally been spoken. Finally, finally, finally... he got to meet his soulmate...

Shisui's hands shot out so he could grab Sakura by her upper arms, immediately resisting the urge to shake her.

“Why in the hell would that be the first thing you say to me!?” he cried out, Sakura's jaw dropping as she stared up at him in shock, “I've had that nonsensical crap plastered on my chest for *years!*”

“Bullshit it is!” she immediately blurted out, slapping his arms away and taking a rapid step backwards.

Without a moment of hesitation, Shisui ripped open the clasp to the harness for his tanto, shoving off both the leather harness and his sword from his shoulder. As his weapon clattered to the ground, he grabbed the hem of his high collared shirt, dragging the cloth over his head. It too fell to the concrete below his feet with the rest of his mess of suddenly unimportant possessions.

Sakura looked on with wide eyes, one foot back as if prepared to run, and only leaned forward when he dramatically gestured to her ramblings printed across his chest in her neat handwriting.

“Believe me now!?”

Sakura stared, wide eyed, at his soulmark, her mouth opening and closing as she struggled to come up with words.

“How is that on you? That can’t be on you!” she finally squeaked, panic building in her tone.

“You knew!” Shisui accused, finally forcing her to tear her eyes away from her words on his chest, “You knew I was your soulmate and you never told me!”

“I never *knew*! I never would have thought that strew of bullshit I just spat out would be anywhere on anyone’s body, let alone yours!” Sakura shot back, throwing her arms up.

“You’re lying! The first thing I ever said to you was ‘It’s nice to meet you, Lady Sakura’! How did you know?”

“I didn’t-I wasn’t sure! I-I didn’t want it to be true back then!”

“What are you talking about? Back when?” he interrogated before paused and angrily adding, “How long have you known?!”

“Shit, I knew you wouldn’t remember!” she started, raking her hands through her bangs, “I just, I didn’t want-!”

“Remember what?” Shisui interrupted.

Sakura took a deep breath as she took a half step back, her eyes finally breaking away from his as she wrapped her arms around her middle.

“It was when you got poisoned five years back while working at the Fire Palace. I was the medic who came and healed you. After the procedure, I was doing a check up on you and you woke up for a second and-and you said...” Her arms tightened around herself as she closed her eyes, as if to muster strength. “You said ‘I didn’t know angels had pink hair’ and passed back out...”

“There’s no way I said that!” he argued, anger rapidly building within him at her admission.

“You did, you bastard! How else would *that* be on you then!” Sakura roared back, her arms unlooping from around her middle so she could jab a finger at the mark on his chest.

“And you *chose* this as the first thing to say to me! After five fucking years?!” Shisui yelled in return, “I’ve never been able to take my shirt off in public lest people think my soulmate was a nutcase!”

“I didn’t think that my random blathering would be *on you*! I hoped-I thought it was just a mistake! It wasn’t supposed to *be there*! It wasn’t supposed to be *true*!” she shot back, desperation beginning to verge on her tone as her eyes began to water, “It was supposed to be a mistake, you weren’t supposed to be my soulmate!”

“You knew I would be if what I apparently first said to you was on you! I don’t believe it! It probably says ‘It’s nice to meet you, Lady Sakura’ and you just came up with something specific to check everyone who says it to you!” Shisui accused, taking a step forward before demanding, “Show me!”

Glaring up at him, she growled, “Hell no! I’m not showing you!”

Shisui shot forward, grabbing her arm with the intent of yanking up the long sleeve of her sage green top. After all, she had worn concealing elbow guards during the mission so that was mostly likely where her soulmark was written. Who would wear something like that, and then long sleeves, if they weren’t trying to hide something?

What the Uchiha hadn’t expected was the chakra loaded punch to his gut, one which not only knocked him backwards and onto his back but one that knocked all the air out of his lungs. Without speaking another word, and while he struggled to catch the breath he had so suddenly lost, she stormed off.

By the time that Shisui finally gathered his wits and caught his breath, Itachi was standing above him. Clutching his screaming abdomen and knowing, without a doubt, that his stomach would be black and blue come morning, he shakily sat up.

“Splendid work, Shisui. I don’t think I’ve ever seen soulmates meet in

such a romantic way,” Itachi commented in a deadpan, one eyebrow quirked as he gazed down at him.

Shisui shot him a look, glaring up at him from his spot seated on the concrete. Itachi silently held out a hand and, after huffing in agitation, Shisui took it. The younger Uchiha pulled him to his feet, Shisui’s stomach throbbing as if he had been stabbed instead of punched.

“Well, I can’t believe that she knew and came up with this nonsense plastered on my body!” Shisui lamented in return, leaning down to snatch up his inside out shirt and shake off the dirt, “And that she waited five years. Five *years*!”

“I can’t believe you ripped off your own shirt in public, made a scene in front of all these people, and then tried to *take off her clothes* to find your required proof,” Itachi replied, unimpressed.

The elder Uchiha’s gaze finally snapping up to the dozen or so people mulling about around them and pretending as if they hadn’t witnessed the meeting between him and Sakura. His cheeks grew hot from embarrassment as he tugged his shirt back on.

As Shisui leaned down and grabbed his leather holster, his tanto still strapped to the back, Itachi spoke again.

“If that string of gibberish is on your chest, that makes her your soulmate either way, does it not?” he asked pointedly.

Shisui’s mouth popped open as he considered his words before his gaze snapped back to where Sakura had run off. Breathing out through his teeth, he dropped his face into his palm. “Damnit...”

“If you really don’t believe her story, perhaps you should speak to Lady Tsunade. Sakura did foist your case onto Shizune after she healed you,” he suggested simply as Shisui pulled his holster back onto his shoulders and snapped the clasp shut.

“She... She did?” he asked before his eyes narrowed in suspicion, “Did you know about this this whole time? And you never told me?”

Itachi shrugged in response, saying nothing.

Shisui sighed dramatically before leaning down to gather his spilled groceries, frowning at his crushed and weeping tomato before shoving it into the crumpled paper bag. Wiping the juice onto his pant leg, he stood, adjusting his bag of groceries so the tattered paper wouldn’t rip farther. As he began to walk away, not bothering with a goodbye with his thoughts swarming in his head, Itachi called out.

“And perhaps an apology would be in order as well? That is, if you actually want to be with your soulmate like you always dreamed instead of searching for an unmarked like the rest of us?”

Shisui paused in his steps before grumbling under his breath and continuing onward without another word.

Shisui had never been bothered by the smell of antiseptic. He knew more than a handful of shinobi who absolutely could not stand the smell of the hospital but Shisui found it comforting. After all, the first thing he had smelled when he had woken up following his suicide attempt was the scent of antiseptic. The smell was oddly comforting and he found no reason to be bothered by it or a stay at the hospital.

Although he could admit that his visit to the hospital today left him less than comfortable.

After navigating the maze of corridors, Shisui finally found himself standing before the intimidating wooden door leading into the office of the director of the hospital. As he stared into the knot in the oak, he could feel as his heart began to pick up its pace in his chest. Not from fear of the woman within but of fear of the truth that awaited him inside.

He raised his hand and knocked on her door twice, waiting patiently for her response. When Tsunade's aggravated voice called out from within, beckoning him inside, Shisui finally opened the door and entered the office of the hospital director.

Despite the director appearing as if she had been in the middle of looking over some paperwork, the smell of sake in the air was a dead giveaway. Ignoring the scent of alcohol, Shisui came forward to stand before Tsunade's desk.

"Lady Tsunade, I apologize for bothering you while you're..." Shisui paused for a moment. "In the middle of paperwork."

"Yes, it's fine, don't worry about it. Just get to the point and tell me what you want. I'm a busy woman," Tsunade returned, impatient, as she rested her elbows on her desk.

"It's about Sakura," Shisui broached, not missing how Tsunade's eyes widened in surprise.

"Oh?"

“I... spoke to her today.”

Tsunade didn't speak, instead arching her brow at him pointedly and waiting for him to explain.

Shisui took a deep breath before continuing onward. “Itachi told me that Sakura was the one who had handled my case when I was poisoned back at the Fire Palace. He told me that she had foisted off my case shortly after arriving? Could you tell me why?”

There was a heavy pause between them before Tsunade sighed heavily, leaning back into her chair. Her eyes flicked down and, shaking her head, she reached into a drawer of her desk and pulled out a bottle of sake and a dish. Time seemed to drag on forever as she silently poured herself a drink. Her piercing gaze snapped up to meet his eyes and, after considering him for a long moment, she pulled out a second dish and filled it as well.

“I suppose congratulations are in order then?” Tsunade thought aloud before pushing the dish of sake towards Shisui, “Drink up, Uchiha.”

“Lady Tsunade... Please...” Shisui beseeched, his voice heavy with emotion.

“Tch, ungrateful brat,” she hissed before downing one of the dishes. There was a weighted pause as she considered the empty cup before she finally spoke, “Sakura got ahold of me shortly after arriving at the Fire Palace. She informed me that the patient that she had been assigned had been cured of his poisoning and that he was already on the path to recovery.”

Shisui leaned forward, his heart racing as he listened carefully. Tsunade set down the cup only to pick up the other filled dish.

“She also informed me that said patient, in a confused stupor, had spoken the words on her soulmark. Something about angels and pink hair,” Tsunade finally revealed before finishing the second dish herself.

Shisui’s heart stopped. Sakura had been telling the truth. And he had yelled at her, called her a liar to her face, demanded she show him proof...

He was a *fool*.

“I...” Shisui tried before the weight building in his chest forced him to clear his throat, “Thank you, Lady Tsunade. I’ll be taking my leave.”

When he turned to exit her office, he felt unsteady on his feet. How could he have been such an idiot? Sakura was his soulmate, the woman he had waited for for his entire life. And he had so effectively shoved her away...

What was he going to do?

“Uchiha,” Tsunade started, forcing him to stop in his steps, “I’m certain that you know but I will tell you anyways. If you hurt my student, I’ll break your legs.”

“You just might have to...” Shisui muttered, dejected, before finally leaving and closing the door behind him.

Weeks.

It had been weeks. Weeks that Shisui desperately try to apologize to Sakura. Weeks that his soulmate had repeatedly and aggressively rejected him. Weeks that he progressively felt more and more like the worst person on the face of the planet.

Shisui had first tried to visit Sakura at the hospital to apologize for everything when he had been informed that she was in the middle of surgery. He had decided to wait for her in the viewing area of the operating room and had been entranced by her working. Even covered in blood up to her elbows and with the front of her smock splattered in gore, she remained focused and unwavering. At least until she had finished up her surgery and had finally noticed him watching her. His greeting smile and nervous wave had been met with a deep scowl and a call to security.

He had tried to approach her at the marketplace, the place where they had first met. When she had spotted him making his way towards her in the crowd, she had glared at him before turning her back to him and leaving. His pursuit of her, however, was cut off by a livid Yamanaka who had no qualms about telling him off in the middle of the crowded street.

Yet another humiliating show for the shopkeepers and patrons who occupied the marketplace.

Deciding that his next approach needed a bit more finesse, and now knowing that the Yamanaka woman was a friend of Sakura's, Shisui took a different route the third time. After paying a visit to the Yamanaka family's flower shop, and after being told off a second time by the livid blonde, he had finally been able to get out his side of the story. By the end of his explanation, the woman, whose name he came to learn was Ino, had become a surprise ally.

Ino proceeded to inform him that she was a romantic just like him and that she herself fantasized over finally meeting her soulmate. She had told him that despite the fact that he was an 'S class dumbass' that she couldn't bring herself to 'stand in the way of love'. Shisui had simply wanted to talk to Ino to suss out Sakura's address so he could finally explain himself to his soulmate but his plan had been quickly shot down by the dominant Yamanaka.

Instead of leaving the flower shop with an address, he left it with an address, a bouquet of flowers the size of his torso, and all the cash missing from his wallet. As he walked towards the address written on the back of his receipt - one that did not reflect the amount of money he had just spent - he wondered if the blonde was really an ally at all and if he had just been scammed instead.

Climbing the stairs to the second floor of the upscale apartments built near the hospital, he finally came upon the address he had been given. After gently knocking on the door, Shisui had been nearly as shocked as Sakura when the kunoichi finally opened the door. His nervous greeting smile had been met with a furious growl and she had slammed the door in his face so hard that it had cracked down the middle.

Shisui had left the flowers on her doorstep, a silent offering. When he had found a reason to pass by her apartment the next day, however, he had found his twenty thousand ryou worth of flowers scattered around the dumpster for the apartments as if she had smashed them against the side of the steel container.

Determining that he needed another tactic to finally get to speak with his soulmate, he decided that he could use the advice of one of her best friends and his old student Sasuke. The dubbed Wandering Ninja had finally come back into town following the resounding defeat of the leaders of the Akatsuki, the shinobi Pain and the kunoichi Konan, and was staying for a few days to visit with friends and family.

It was on the third day of his stay that Shisui finally went to Sasuke's often empty home in the Uchiha district to visit with his old student. When Sasuke had opened the door to discover Shisui on the other side, his first reaction had been to shake his head and step aside to let him in.

A poor prognosis and one that reflected the hopelessness of his situation.

"What can I do to get her to listen to me?" Shisui had asked, desperate for even an inkling of a solution. He needed to talk to her, he needed her to listen to his apology.

"Sorry to say that you're out of luck. She hates you," Sasuke had informed curtly, not bothering with pleasantries, "And who wouldn't if what she told me is right. You're lucky she didn't kill you."

Despite feeling as if his heart had been ripped out of his chest, the rest of the visit had been pleasant.

That night, Shisui had found himself sitting on his engawa, alone, nursing a bottle of sake as he watched the sun set. He lamented his words and his actions towards Sakura as his eyes unseeing stared out at the changing colors of the sky. He couldn't believe that he had allowed his upset, his hurt and his anger, to control him. That he had been so stupid as to so effectively push her away.

He didn't know what he was supposed to do...

He had messed up so badly that he was terrified that he had ruined any relationship he could have with his own soulmate, the woman he

had been made for. He was so desperate to get to know her, to finally be united with her. He just wanted to talk to her. To hear her voice, to memorize how she looked when she was happy, to learn about her life. He had waited thirty years to finally meet her and he was frightened that he would never truly be able to do so.

He just needed a chance to finally apologize, to tell her how he felt... He needed her to listen to him, to understand that he was sorry and that he had just been upset. That he had been furious that she had kept it a secret from him. That he had been doubtful because he never got to experience speaking the words on her soulmark. That he had been so incredibly hurt that she said she had never wanted him as her soulmate anyways...

As Shisui sat and silently nursed his drink, the sun having long since set and leaving him in darkness, he considered using his sharingan on Sakura. He would never use Kotoamatsukami to plant false memories of her loving him into her mind but... What if he used it just to make her listen to him?

Dropping his head, ashamed he had even had such thoughts, he abandoned such a despicable plan. It would be more than wrong to influence her in such a way and he knew he could never stoop so low as to use mind control on his own soulmate.

Uncaringly tossing his empty bottle of sake to the side, the glass bottle disappearing into the grass surrounding his home, Shisui finally rose to his feet and unsteadily made his way inside.

No matter what, he needed to figure out something...

That next morning, after treating a pounding hangover with a visit to

his favorite restaurant for an order of okonomiyaki with everything on it, he found himself at a loss. He had no idea what to do with himself or what he could do to fix his relationship with Sakura.

Part of him wondered if it would be good for him, and for her as well, if he were gone for a while. After deciding that he would take on a mission to get away from the village for a bit, something to take his mind off of everything and to give her space, he had decided to go speak with Itachi. When he went to go speak with him, however, him and Izumi both had immediately turned him away.

They knew him better than anyone. They could see how regret fogged his senses and how desperation fueled his actions. They asserted that he wasn't in the right state of mind to take any mission, let alone the S-ranked missions he was always assigned. Shisui had tried to argue that he would even accept a D-ranked mission if it could take his mind off of things but they had refused to allow even that.

Despite what Shisui had said, he was grateful that Itachi hadn't saddled him with such a low ranking mission. He wasn't sure if his pride could take the damage if he had been tasked with finding Madam Shijimi's lost cat. Especially after having spent most of his adult life leading the Royal Guard which protected Madam Shijimi and her husband's, the Fire Daimyo's, lives.

He was grateful even if their refusal to give him a mission had lead to his hopeless situation now. Struggle against the feeling of regret and loss building within him, and with his distress rising as he sat listless in his own home, he decided that a workout may do him some good. At the very least, practicing his jutsu might take his mind off of *her* even if just for a moment.

When Shisui arrived at the training fields and as he approached one of the larger fields at the back, a spacious and safe location for S-rank ninja such as himself to practice their craft, he had been startled from his depressed stupor by the sensation of the earth trembling beneath

his feet.

When he finally snapped out of his daze and his gaze fell upon the kunoichi currently decimating the training field with nothing but her bare hands, he felt as his heart skipped a beat in his chest.

What were the odds that Sakura would be using the same training field that he had set his eyes on? Whether he was cursed or blessed in that moment, Shisui had no idea.

As he watched her flit across the field, dressed in her full battle garb and fighting a clone of herself, he thought of what he should do. Part of him considered just leaving then and there. She obviously wanted nothing to do with him; every one of her reactions in response to his approaches had proved that. Not just that, but seeing her pull boulders from the earth and vault them across the field at her clone with the same ease he threw kunai was an intimidating sight on a woman who was actively upset with him.

The other part of him just wanted to give it one more shot... To try and see if she might talk to him this time, despite the very real sense of danger he felt as he watched his soulmate rip a full grown oak from the earth, dirt scattering as she flew across the field to attack her foe with the unusual yet terrifying weapon.

Deciding that he would take this final chance, Shisui stepped onto the training field, cautiously approaching the kunoichi. Despite remaining a safe distance away, he could feel the moment that she sensed him. Sakura glanced over at him while she delivered the final blow to her own clone, swinging the oak down upon her temporary opponent and dispelling it with a puff of smoke.

When she finally turned to face him, fury in her expression as she stared him down, he stood silently. He didn't smile, instead remaining

unmoving and quiet as he waited for her to decide if she wanted to approach him. He didn't want her to run off again but, if she decided yet again that she did not want to talk to him, he would accept it. He would respect her decision no matter how much it broke his heart. He was desperate to get to know her, to know who his soulmate was, but if she chose to never come near him again then-

Holy crap she was coming over pretty fast.

It was only the years of honing his reflexes that allowed Shisui to overcome his shock and react in time, shooting out of the way as Sakura swung her tree down upon him with such a ferocity that the earth exploded outward upon impact. The ground quaked beneath their feet, dirt and splinters raining down upon them as the tree snapped in half. Abandoning her weapon, she rushed him, descending upon him with a speed that startled him.

Shisui had seen her fight during the battle against Kakuzu but being the recipient of that fury was much more intimidating than simply being an onlooker.

He knew better than to disrespect her by not taking her challenge seriously, knowing full well that he was facing the wrath of the most powerful kunoichi on the planet, one of the strongest shinobi in existence. Despite knowing that she would never truly kill him on this field, he was smart enough to know that she would certainly damage him in ways she could fix if need be.

Shisui didn't want to experience the kind of damage that the most skilled medical ninja in history could inflict and still repair.

With his sharingan already spinning to life, Shisui immediately assumed his peak form to battle against her. Despite being one of the most powerful shinobi in the five nations himself, Shisui had no doubt

that Sakura was far more than just a challenge.

The abilities he had that would give him the advantage in any other battle, namely his sharingan and his body flicker technique, simply allowed him to dodge her rapid, earth shattering strikes. She had trained with Sasuke nearly her entire life and was well versed in the abilities of an Uchiha; even his teleportation technique was just enough to skirt out of the range of her attacks.

The spar rapidly degenerated into him simply dodging and trying not to fall on his ass as she decimated the landscape around him. Violent earthquakes wrenched the earth as she tore the ground to pieces, tremors rattled him to his bones as he dodged thrown boulders and oaks, and shockwaves rippled through his body as he skirted around her punches and kicks. During their entire spar, he had only had the time to string together the handsigns for a few fire jutsu and those had only come in handy long enough to incinerate the projectiles she would lob at him when he escaped her immediate swinging range.

Despite the adrenaline surging through his veins, Shisui couldn't help but be astounded by Sakura's strength. He had only faced someone as powerful as her a handful of times in his life and witnessing her skill first hand was an experience that both amazed and intimidated him. He only prayed that she did not activate her Strength of a Hundred seal or he would not escape this fight unscathed. If it wasn't for his speed and his mastery of the Flash Step, he would not have come as far as this.

After a half hour of their game of cat and mouse, both Shisui and Sakura stood at opposite ends of the field, panting as they desperately tried to catch their breath. His sharingan briefly flicked across the once pristine training ground around them, instead greeted with annihilated scenery. The fresh grass and a lush treeline were instead replaced with upturned land dotted with craters, uprooted trees, and unearthed boulders.

When Shisui's eyes returned to her, Sakura met his gaze with a glare. Instead of shooting forward, as she would if she intended to continue this battle, she strode forward, her footsteps heavy but deliberate. He halfway rose his guard, not certain what to expect in that moment as she approached him.

"Sakura, I-" he tried as she grew closer only for her to cut him off with a harsh slap against his cheek.

Sakura's open handed slap jerked his head to the side, the sound of skin on skin somehow louder than her tearing apart the landscape earlier. Shisui blinked in shock as he reached up to cradle his stinging cheek.

"You're such an asshole!" Sakura shouted in his face, her hands forming fists at her sides as she scowled up at him.

"I can't believe that you finally find out we're soulmates and the first thing you do is yell at me! Call me a *liar* to my face!" she howled, Shisui finally turning to look upon his soulmate with wide eyes.

Sakura was... talking to him?

"My blathering was your soulmark and you demand some kind of proof from me like that wasn't proof enough!" she yelled, tears building in her eyes.

"I didn't know if you were really my soulmate, I didn't want to know! I didn't want it to be true because-because of how scared I've been! You don't know how terrified I've been since you first spoke those words to me!" Sakura continued, her voice beginning to tremble.

“I was *only sixteen!*” she finished, her hands shooting up to hide her face as the tears in her eyes finally spilled down her cheeks.

The silence that followed her declaration was deafening. Sakura dropped her head to hide her openly crying, her sobs and sniffles feeling like a red hot brand to his heart.

“I’m sorry,” Shisui finally gasped, his voice thick with emotion.

“I’m so sorry. I was upset because I couldn’t believe my soul mark was so *fucking ridiculous*. I was so angry that you kept it a secret from me. And I was hurt because you said that you never wanted me as your soulmate, despite me having waited all my life for you...” he explained, his own hurt welling in his chest as he spoke.

“I always knew that you were going to be so much younger than me. My soulmark, your words to me, appeared when I was eight. I knew this and I *never* would have forced you into a relationship that you weren’t comfortable with,” he pushed on, tears of his own building in his sharingan bright eyes as he bore his heart to his soulmate, “I just wanted to know you so desperately...”

Shisui took a moment to take a steeling breath, swallowing back the lump building in his throat, before continuing, “But I never should have yelled at you like that and I never should have grabbed at you like I did... And I will be sorry for that for the rest of my life.”

Slowly and cautiously, Shisui reached out to Sakura, sneaking beneath the hands wiping away her tears to cup her wet cheeks. She allowed him to raise her head so their eyes could meet, her reddened eyes looking up into his.

“I waited thirty years for you and I lost you because of my stupidity...”

Please..." he whispered, praying she could see the sincerity in his soul as she gazed into his eyes, "Give me a chance?"

Sakura's bottom lip quivered as another tear slipped free, sliding down her cheek and across his fingertips. The silence between them lasted for a few heartbeats but, as he waited for her answer, it felt as if lifetimes had passed.

When she finally nodded, wrenching her eyes away and reaching up to wipe away the tear tracks from her cheeks, Shisui released the breath he had been holding, a tear of his own slipping free. Pure, unadulterated joy ran through him at Sakura's silent response, the weight of the world suddenly slipping free from his shoulders. In his bliss, he reached out, wrapping his arms around Sakura, his soulmate, and pulling her close. She readily slipped into his embrace, pressing her cheek against his chest as her arms tightly wrapped around his middle.

His breath was shaky as he continued to fight back his tears of joy, instead trying to bask in the sensation of finally holding his soulmate for the first time; in finally being united with her, in her giving him her forgiveness, and in her giving him a chance after his blundering.

"I'm sorry I slapped you..." Sakura sniffled against his chest, her words muffled by his shirt.

Shisui huffed out a broken laugh, the tears he had been desperately trying to hold back finally slipping free as he held her tighter, pressing his cheek to the crown of her head.

"I kind of deserved it."

A number of people have commented asking whether Sakura saw Shisui's soulmark while treating his poisoning and she did not! His soulmark was covered by a special bandage, decorated with the kanji for "soulmark" that doubles as a seal. These bandages are a common practice used to conceal soulmarks while a person is staying at the hospital and can only be removed by the patients themselves. A new addition that I came up with recently.

Okonomiyaki, Shisui's comfort food and personal hangover cure, is very similar to a pancake with additions such as eggs, cabbage, cheese, a variety of meats, and others added as toppings. I base ryou off of the Japanese yen so twenty thousand ryou is about \$200.

In this alternate universe, Itachi never joined the Akatsuki. In canon, his influence is critical when it came to recruiting members. He had an integral role in both Deidara and Hidan joining the Akatsuki and, without his influence, I don't believe that these two would have joined.

Tobi, Zetsu, Pain, and Konan are the backbone of the Akatsuki and still exist in this world as members of this group. Kisame already had ties with Tobi which lead to his joining following his defection from the Village Hidden in the Mist. I think it's likely that Kakuzu would join simply because he wants to make money and he thinks that this group is pretty good at accumulating funds. Sasori's reasons for joining are pretty ambiguous but I think that, with the Akatsuki being so small and unknown, he wouldn't have bothered joining.

This leaves the Akatsuki with just Tobi, Zetsu, Pain, Konan, Kakuzu, and Kisame (now just Tobi, Zetsu, and Kisame) to struggle to gather all the tailed beings. Needless to say, they made no progress and die off rather quickly with Sasuke hunting them down on Itachi's orders and with run ins with powerhouses like Sakura and Naruto.

Bond

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Even though this should have been one of the happiest moments in Shisui's life, a night that he could look back on for the rest of his days with contentment and warmth, his rising anxiety would not allow him to relax. No matter what he tried, he could not find an easy calm and just enjoy the presence of his soulmate at his side.

He was far too concerned about making a good impression on his and Sakura's first date.

"It was ridiculous! It took him a whole three days to finally get to the hospital to have them take care of his broken wrist! Sometimes I don't know how those two survive without me around," Sakura laughed, shaking her head in exasperation as she regaled him with a story about his nephew.

"It was just as difficult to get him to the hospital in the capital city actually," Shisui returned, grinning, "I can't tell you how many times I literally had to drag him there."

"I just hope you're better at getting yourself to the hospital when you need it," she informed with a pointed look.

"Heh, I'd say I'm a little better at it. I think I just wasn't spoiled by a talented medical ninja like Sasuke was when I was a kid," he joked,

picking at a stray thread at the hem of his shirt nervously before forcing himself to stop for what felt like the dozenth time that night.

“That’s good to hear. I’d hate to get home from a mission and find out you stayed injured just so I could take care of you.”

Shisui was grateful that his bumbling and fidgeting was easily hidden behind Sakura’s open and warm presence. It was thanks to her easy conversation that he was at least able to not make a complete fool of himself as they walked along the city streets together.

Even so, Shisui found himself distracted by thoughts of where he was taking Sakura for their first date. He had thought of this day ever since he was a kid, ever since he had first learned about soulmates and ever since he first began to daydream about spending time with them. He had been planning out their first date for as long as he could remember and he had decided long ago that he would take her somewhere special. Somewhere fancy that would be worthy of her, somewhere where he could spoil her and maybe even impress her.

The closer and closer that they drew to the most high end restaurant in Konoha, however, the more and more his anxiety grew.

“I’m pretty curious about where you decided to take us. You’ve been so mysterious about it. I hope it’s not anything too fancy,” Sakura commented, regret instantly building within him at her off handed comment as they, as if on cue, finally arrived at the restaurant.

Shoving his hands into his pockets, he stopped in front of the establishment he had picked out years ago - a place that suddenly felt ridiculous instead of romantic. As watched Sakura's gaze fall upon the overly lavish building and as he watched her work to keep the smile on her face from dropping, he felt his anxiety grow further.

"Er, is, uh..." Sakura cleared her throat before gently asking, "Are we going to be eating here?"

"Yes, I... thought this would be a nice place," Shisui explained awkwardly.

"It's... very fancy," she replied before rapidly adding on, "I mean fancy is okay! I mean it's good. This is good."

"Yes, it..." he tried before shaking his head and starting again, "I mean, do you want to go inside?"

"Of course," Sakura answered, offering him a placating smile, "Let's get something to eat."

At Sakura's smile, Shisui felt some of his anxiety abate. Stepping between two large stone statues of komainu and passing through hand carved doors flanked by potted bamboo, they entered the warmly lit restaurant. After slipping off their shoes and stepping into the provided slippers, and as their gazes traveled across the numerous decorations just in the receiving area of the restaurant, they were approached by a greeter.

“Mr. Uchiha, I assume? Welcome to The Golden Lotus. Your private room has already been prepared. If you’ll wait here for just a moment, your hostess will be with you shortly,” the woman, draped in a sage green kimono decorated with filigree sewn from golden thread, greeted warmly.

“Thank you,” he returned, embarrassment once again overcoming him as the woman bowed and retreated back into the restaurant.

As Shisui and Sakura politely waited for their hostess, Shisui watched Sakura from the corner of his eyes. No matter how she tried to play off that she was happy going here for their first date, he could easily tell that she was uncomfortable. He watched as her eyes lingered on the passing patrons and the hostesses, all incredibly well dressed in elaborate kimonos and expensive pins. He felt his heart sink when she grabbed the edges of her coat and pulled it tightly around her, as if to hide herself from the judgmental looks from those who passed.

He could tell that she was uncomfortable and, as he watched her shift her weight from one foot to the other, he tried to come up with something to say to comfort her. When he finally opened his mouth to speak, still fumbling for anything to say, he was interrupted by the appearance of a dark haired woman dressed in an intricately decorated navy kimono sewn with silver thread.

The woman approached them with a smile and a bow before introducing herself, “Good evening. My name is Amaya and I will be your hostess tonight. It is a pleasure to meet you. Please be my guest.”

“Thank you for having us as your guest,” Sakura replied politely.

Shisui cleared his throat before answering formally, “Thank you for your hospitality.”

“Please, allow me to take you to your room,” their hostess spoke softly, her polite smile never fading as she lead them down a hallway decorated with sprawling and lifelike paintings of landscapes and flora.

Stopping in front of a sliding door decorated with a painting of a plum tree, Amaya revealed their private room. Tatami mats spanned across the floor, the straw weaving soft beneath their slippered feet. A low table sat in the middle of the spacious room, flanked on either side by plush cushions. The paper walls were painted with images of a variety of flowering trees and decorative plants stood in the corners, creating a peaceful scene in the warmly lit space.

Stepping inside, Shisui and Sakura knelt down onto the cushions on either side of the table, their hostess following them inside and placing two menus before them. Only three dishes were listed on the simply decorated menus: Ayu sweetfish, shabu-shabu, and chirashi sushi.

“Please, make yourselves comfortable, I will return with your appetizers shortly. Can I interest you in some sake for your meal? We have a wide variety of sakes from all over the continent. We are one of the few establishments in the country that carries the famous Juyondai 'Ryusen' Junmai Daiginjo sake, if you are so inclined,” the hostess informed, both Shisui and Sakura’s eyes widening in surprise, “We also have Juyondai 'Sichitare Nijikkan' Junmai Daiginjo sake and

Gozenshu 'Bodaimoto' Nigori Junmai sake for the discerning customer. Or perhaps you would be interested in our specialty, our Midorikawa Daiginjo sake?"

"Thank you for your suggestions. Could I have a dish of the Midorikawa Daiginjo sake, please," Shisui replied.

"Of course. And you, ma'am?"

"I... I'll just get the same, thank you," Sakura answered, her cheeks heating in embarrassment.

"Very well. I will return shortly with your drinks and your appetizers. Please browse our menu during your wait," Amaya informed with a polite smile and a bow before she stepped out, quietly sliding the door shut to give them their privacy.

The silence from before returned once again without the polite presence of the hostess to buffer their interactions.

"So... It's a surprise they have that Ryusen sake here... Isn't that really expensive?" Shisui tried in an attempt to bring back the easy conversation from the walk to the restaurant.

"It is," Sakura returned, fidgeting in her seat.

The uncomfortable silence filled the room once again, the only sound being the gentle conversation in the rooms surrounding their own.

“So... This is... nice,” she tried awkwardly.

“Honestly...” he began, taking a breath before he spoke what he knew was on both of their minds, “This is a lot more awkward than I had envisioned.”

She opened her mouth as if to speak but, instead of replying, she offered him a polite smile.

The silence reigned for another few heartbeats before Shisui leaned in and quietly asked, “Do you want to get out of here?”

“Yes!” Sakura answered, perhaps too quickly, before blushing and correcting herself, “I mean... Yes, I would like that.”

Shisui smiled at Sakura’s reaction, relief instantly washing over him. He had wanted tonight to be a night that they could both look back on fondly not an awkward dinner that they had to push through.

The sliding door to their room opened and their hostess entered,

carrying a tray with their dishes of sake and two plates of jiaozi settled on top. She knelt next to their table, quietly settling their drinks and their appetizers before them, before asking, "What would you both like for your meals?"

"I'm actually very sorry for this, considering we're already taken up so much of your time, but we both actually have business with the hokage here very shortly. I'm afraid we'll have to leave immediately," Shisui lied smoothly, giving their hostess an apologetic smile.

"Oh, that is very important indeed. I'll be happy to get you your check," Amaya answered kindly before turning to face Sakura, "Although, I... I apologize for asking but... Are you Sakura Haruno?"

"Yes, that's me," Sakura replied, confused, before the woman smiled widely and placed a hand over her heart in excitement.

"I am so sorry for speaking so informally but I wanted to thank you for everything you've done! I'm not sure if you remember but you treated my daughter in the past after she was hurt during a mission as a genin. It's because of you that she was inspired to become a medical ninja and she was recently accepted into the medical corps," she explained excitedly.

"That's wonderful! I'm honored to hear that someone was inspired by me, especially into becoming a medical ninja. We can always use more medical ninja not just in the field but at the hospital as well," Sakura replied, laughing in embarrassment, "I hope your daughter is doing well?"

“Of course! She has dedicated her life to the study of medicine and my wife and I are so proud of her,” Amaya replied, reaching out to place her hand over Sakura’s before warmly thanking, “Thank you once again, Lady Sakura. Not just for what you did for my daughter but for everything you do for the village. You are a blessing.”

“Oh, er, thank you so much,” Sakura replied with a heavy blush before the hostess squeezed her hand and pulled away.

“I’ll return shortly with your bill,” Amaya stated with a smile before bowing and exiting the room once again.

“Wow, I had no idea my soulmate was a celebrity,” Shisui joked once the door to their room slid shut. Deciding that he might as well enjoy what had already been delivered, he reached down to lift his dish and took a drink from his sake.

“That’s kind of funny coming from you, Shisui the Teleporter,” Sakura redirected, her cheeks still painted red in embarrassment.

“I don’t seem to remember our hostess recognizing me and taking my hand in hers to tell her how grateful she was that I’m around,” he teased.

“Are you jealous?” Sakura returned slyly, taking her chopsticks in her hands and popping one of the jiaozi from her plate into her mouth.

“Maybe a little,” Shisui laughed, drawing a grin from her.

Their hostess returned shortly after with their bill in hand, placing it on the table between them.

“Thank you so much again once again, Lady Sakura. I hope that my daughter Kasumi one day does you proud in the hospital like she does for me and my wife,” Amaya thanked once again.

“Of course. I’ll be sure to keep an eye on her for you as well. I’m certain she’ll be a great medical ninja one day,” Sakura answered with a smile.

“Thank you. Have a wonderful day, Lady Sakura,” she continued before turning to regard Shisui, “And you as well sir.”

While the hostess missed Shisui’s dejected look as she turned to leave, Sakura didn’t, the medic hiding her amused grin behind her hand until Amaya left.

“Are you ready to go, *sir*?” Sakura teased as she reached into her purse to pull out her wallet.

“Sure am, *Lady Sakura*, right after I pay for this,” he replied with a chuckle.

“No way, I’m going to pay for my half,” she asserted sharply.

“I just feel bad for taking us somewhere so formal for our first date. Let me pay for this one,” he explained and, before she could argue, he added on, “But I’d be more than happy to get treated next time around.”

“It’s a deal then,” Sakura agreed before scooping up her dish of sake and downing it in one go.

When Shisui quirked an amused eyebrow at her downing her drink, she defended, “Hey, I’m not letting it go to waste!”

Shaking his head in amusement, he pulled out a number of ryo from his own wallet and tucked them beneath the bill. Following Sakura’s lead, he downed the rest of his own dish before standing.

“Ready to go?” he asked as Sakura stood.

“Yes, let’s get out of here,” she replied enthusiastically before they both left the restaurant in a silent hurry.

Making only a brief stop to replace their borrowed slippers with their own shoes, they made their way out of the restaurant. Once back outside in the cool night air, they both breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well, that didn’t turn out how I expected... Honestly, I don’t really have another plan,” Shisui admitted, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment, as they walked down the city street together.

“Here, I think I know a place that will be a little more comfortable,” Sakura offered.

He smiled and nodded in agreement. “Lead the way.”

Shisui hadn’t known what to expect but being herded to a crowded tempura stand in the merchant’s district hadn’t been on the list. Dozens of people were gathered outside the admittedly run down stand, the group of people all clamoring loudly and fighting to place their order.

“Hey, what do you like?” Sakura asked with a smile, drawing his attention away from the arguing crowd.

“Surprise me,” Shisui answered, watching in amusement as she strode directly into the heart of the mass of people. He couldn’t help but laugh as he watched the five and a half foot woman muscle through the crowd as if it were nothing.

It was only a few minutes after disappearing into the crowd that she emerged from the group, a paper bag tucked beneath her arm and not a hair out of place.

“I’d call that an A-rank mission at least,” he joked as she joined him again, drawing a laugh from her which had warmth pooling in his chest.

“I’d say the reward is about the same value,” she laughed in return, longingly gazing down at the bag, “Come on, I know a great place where we can sit.”

“I’m right behind you,” he answered, blinking in surprise when - instead of turning to walk down the roads they had spent the night traveling - she leapt onto the nearby rooftop.

“Well, are you coming?” Sakura yelled down from the rooftop, amusement in her tone, before he smiled widely and leapt up onto the roof to join her.

He hadn’t expected a lot of what had taken place for their first date. Despite his own plan having fallen apart so spectacularly, he found himself happy with the turn the night had taken. Even if one of those turns was chasing after Sakura as she ran across the rooftops like the seasoned Konoha shinobi she was.

Shisui followed her halfway across the village until she finally came to a stop on the tall rooftop of a building on the edge of town. The rooftop was dimly lit by the ambient lighting from nearby buildings and from the light of the quarter moon and, as he drew closer to where Sakura was settling down, he noticed a handful of colorful cushions already laid out.

“Come here often?” he teased as he sat down on one of the cushions next to her, watching as she began unpacking the paper bag.

“Sometimes. Not so much nowadays. This used to be the spot where my friends Ino, Tenten, Hinata, and I would hang out,” she explained as she pulled out a styrofoam box and two glass bottles from the bag and set them on the rooftop between them, “We used to come here all the time when we were still chunin to eat junk food and talk.”

Shisui watched as her eyes separated from the food between them and rose to the sky above them, a smile spreading across her lips as her tone became wistful, “The view from here is always amazing.”

He followed her gaze and was stunned by the view of the starry sky, unhindered by the tall buildings, bright lights, and the electrical lines which spanned throughout the city. The moon hung proudly in the sky and numerous stars blanketed the darkness around it, painting a scene that the intricate paintings at the restaurant couldn't come close to emulating.

“Oh, wow...” he muttered softly, briefly wondering how long it had been since he had enjoyed the sight of the night sky.

“It gets even more beautiful once your eyes adjust,” Sakura hummed as she opened the lid to the box between them, the mouthwatering scent of fried food greeting them both.

Shisui’s gaze finally returned to her before flicking down to the food between them and he watched as Sakura popped the lid off of a cup of sauce tucked in the center of a plate of fried shrimp. After scooping up one of the shrimp by the tail and dunking the head into the sauce, she nudged the open box of takeout towards him. For a moment, he felt his heart skip a beat at how personal sharing a plate was but she seemed unphased.

Clearing his throat to dislodge the sudden lump that had built there, he reached forward and followed her lead. Sakura took a bite of her piece before humming in contentment, her eyes sliding shut in satisfaction, before she reached down and passed him a glass bottle sealed with a twist off lid.

“What’s this?” he asked curiously as he dunked his fried shrimp in the sauce.

“Have you ever had umeshu before? It’s a kind of plum wine. That stand has great tempura but their umeshu is why I always go back,” Sakura explained before laughing, “Not quite as fancy as that other place but it’s my favorite.”

Shisui sighed dramatically, “Will I ever live down taking you to that place for our first date?”

“Probably not,” she deadpanned, drawing a betrayed look from him which made her laugh.

“Honestly though, I really appreciate the thought you put into it. It means a lot to me,” she continued with a comforting smile, “Just give me a little warning next time.”

“Noted,” he chuckled before taking a bite out of his fried shrimp and making a noise of satisfaction behind his mouthful, “Oh wow, this is good.”

“Told you,” Sakura sing-songed in response as she finished off her piece and dumped the tail into the opposite side of the open box.

“You know, I was just thinking: the names you mentioned earlier sound so familiar. I know of Hinata Hyuga of course, she’s the matriarch for the Hyuga clan, but I can’t remember where I’ve heard the other two,” he commented before taking another bite.

“I’m not surprised that you’ve heard of them. You’ve probably met both of them, actually,” Sakura began as she twisted off the lid to her bottle of umeshu, “Tenten owns the weapons shop next to the academy and she’s the most famous weapon manufacturer in the village. She’s the sole supplier for the ANBU right now.”

Shisui quickly finished his bite so he could say, “Oh, I have met her! She forged my most recent tanto! She does great work.”

“She would be thrilled to hear that,” she laughed before taking a sip of her plum sake and continuing, “You’ve probably met Ino too if you’ve been working with the ANBU recently. She’s the new head of the Torture and Interrogation Department. She took over after Ibiki retired.”

“Ino *Yamanaka*? Ibiki’s apprentice?” he parroted, shocked, “Should I, uh... be worried?”

“Not unless you get on her bad side,” she joked in return as she plucked another fried treat from the box between them.

“You have some pretty incredible friends, Sakura,” Shisui complimented, drawing a smile from her.

“We’ve all been friends for a long time. I knew Ino and Hinata since we were all in the academy and I met Tenten during our Chunin Exams. I’m lucky to have them alongside Naruto and Sasuke.” Sakura dipped her piece into the sauce before taking a bite.

“Tell me more about yourself. What’s your family like? Were your parents shinobi as well?” Shisui asked, wanting to know more about her. He knew about his soulmate’s reputation, he knew about her accomplishments and her status, but he wanted to know more about *her*.

“Both of my parents are shinobi actually. My mom is a retired ANBU captain but my dad still takes odd jobs here and there. My mom is from the Senju clan and my dad is from the Haruno clan - my great-grandmother and the rest of my Haruno side of the family all joined Konoha following the destruction of Village Hidden by Whirling Tides. So, it was always expected that I would become a kunoichi,” Sakura detailed before chuckling to herself and shaking her head in amusement, “My parents are both, uh... Really intense people. But, no matter what, they always supported me and I love them all the same.”

“I never would have guessed that you’re a Senju,” Shisui admitted honestly before curiously asking, “What was it like, growing up in the Senju clan?”

The Senju used to be such a massive clan but, over the years, they had been lost to the winds. Whether it be by losing their last name through marriage or from deaths during the Third Shinobi World War and other conflicts over the years, Shisui could count the number of Senju he knew on one hand. Even more than that, without a bloodline trait like the sharingan or a familial trait like the red hair of the Uzumaki clan, it was impossible to tell who had Senju blood.

Shisui could hardly imagine that their families used to be bitter enemies.

“Honestly... I don’t really know anyone else who is part of my mom’s side of the family. I know Lady Tsunade is the granddaughter of the First Hokage so we’re related... somehow. And my mom used to tell me how her grandmother, Toka, was part of the First’s inner circle.” Sakura shrugged. “Nowadays, the Senju are all just so scattered. Not just that but my last name is Haruno so it’s not obvious that I’m

technically part of the clan.”

“I actually used to be so jealous of how close knit the Uchiha clan is when I was a kid,” Sakura huffed in amusement before admitting, “Maybe I still am a little. What was it like growing up in a family that keeps together like that?”

“It’s... not as wonderful as one might think. It was actually pretty-” Shisui paused as he searched for the right word. “-stressful growing up as an Uchiha, especially considering I took to being a shinobi very well when I was really young. There were a few times when I wondered if it would have been better if I was some nameless nobody.”

He thought about the would-be revolt from all those years ago with a heavy heart, how it had only been stopped because of the deal that had been allowed to take place because of his attempted suicide. It was only because of him and Itachi that they were able to keep the peace, that they were able to stop either an insurrection or a massacre.

Probably a bit too heavy of a topic for the first date...

“When I think back on everything that I went through though, I honestly wouldn’t have it any other way. There may have been a lot of responsibility on my shoulders - too much for someone so young - and there may have been bad times but, no matter what, I love and cherish my family. They’re the most important people in the world to me, especially Itachi, Izumi, and Sasuke. I would do anything for them,” Shisui finished, his love for his family and those closest to him making his tone passionate.

Sakura only smiled at him, an unspoken warmth in her eyes and her smile. Embarrassed, he took a sip from his umeshu and glanced off to the side.

“What was it like growing up with the commander of the ANBU and the Fifth Hokage?” she asked instead of commenting on his vehemence.

He smirked into his drink.

“Well, Izumi has always been the kindest person I’ve ever known but she developed a hidden ruthless streak over the years, especially against those who hurt those she cares about. Surprisingly enough, she used to be really weak as a kid. She could hardly use her sharingan at all before she passed out from chakra loss,” Shisui revealed, Sakura’s eyes widening in surprise as she continued to eat from their meal, “But she worked hard to get where she is, to overcome her adversities and earn what she has. She’s always looked out for all of us, especially Itachi and Sasuke, now she just does so far more aggressively.”

“That’s really admirable. It actually reminds me a bit of myself when I was a kid,” Sakura commented.

“And Itachi, well... He’d have you think he’s as hard as stone but he’s a softy underneath it all. He’s the gentlest person I’ve ever met and he’s always put everyone before himself. That’s never changed, even after he became hokage,” Shisui explained as Sakura took a sip from her umeshu, “He just seems unapproachable because of his resting

bitch face.”

Sakura choked on her plum sake in surprise, laughing even through her coughing. Laughing as well, Shisui reached out to pat her on the back to help clear her coughs.

“Sorry, sorry!” she apologized between her coughs and her laughter, “I’ve just never heard anyone talk about the hokage like that before!”

“He may be the hokage now but, to me, he’ll always be the same dorky kid he was when we were growing up,” he chuckled.

“I’m glad to hear that you have people who love you - that you have people that you’re close to. I had always hoped that you had people who cared about you. When you died- or, I-I mean,” she stuttered, quickly correcting herself as his heart dropped in his chest, “What I mean to say is there were times when I worried about you but I’m happy you have people in your life that you love and who love you.”

Of course Sakura would know about the day he died. She was his soulmate, they were connected through their marks. He had heard stories of how, when someone’s soulmate died, that the pain of their mark disappearing felt like they were being burned. He had always known in the back of his mind that she had gone through that but to hear her say it out loud... Part of him wanted to explain everything, to tell her about everything that had happened that night. She was his soulmate after all, she deserved to know the truth.

One day, he would tell her everything. One day, he would explain everything. Tonight, however...

"I had always wondered about who you were and what you were like. Ever since my soulmark appeared, I thought about you every day. Before that even, ever since my father first told me about what soulmates were," he confessed, smiling as her surprised gaze met his, "I daydreamed about what it would be like when I finally met you and what kind of person you would be but nothing came close to measuring up to the incredible person you truly are."

Sakura blushed fiercely at his declaration, her lips parting in surprise. At her shocked look and her stunned silence, he felt embarrassment flood through him as a flush of his own flooded his face.

"I, er - sorry! That was too much too fast, wasn't it?" he apologized quickly, looking anywhere but at her, "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable! I just-!"

"Shisui," Sakura cut him off softly, his gaze finally returning to her even if it was from the corner of his eye.

"Thank you... I think that you're an incredible person as well. With everything that happened between us already... That means a lot to me," she admitted, her eyes lingering on the ground before she met his gaze to say, "What I'm trying to say is... I'm happy that a person like you is my soulmate."

Shisui felt as his heart skipped a beat in his chest at her admission, a smile of his own rapidly building across his lips as warmth rushed through his blood.

“Me too. I’m really happy I finally got to meet you.”

For a long moment, they gazed into each others' eyes, a sense of unspoken understanding and affection between them. Sakura was the first to look away, brushing her fingertips across her cheek as if to wipe away her lingering blush. As Shisui reached down to take the final sip from his umeshu, her gaze once again traveled upwards.

“You know, I think it’s been long enough,” she stated vaguely before leaning back against the cushion beneath her, settling onto her back and gazing up at the sky.

Curious, Shisui’s eyes returned to above them and he was shocked by the beauty of the starry sky. While they had sat on the dim roof together, eating their meal and sharing their stories, their eyes had adjusted to the darkness. With that adjustment came a nearly unhindered view of the stars that had never before seemed so beautiful.

Following Sakura’s lead once again on their first real night together, he leaned back against the cushion beneath him, resting his head on the pillow as he laid down next to her.

“It really is even more beautiful the longer you wait...” Shisui stated,

expressing more in that moment than just his appreciation for the starry sky.

“It really is,” Sakura hummed in agreement.

As they laid back on the roof, quietly enjoying the warmth from their meal and the sky above, Shisui slowly reached out. Even with his heart pounding in his chest, his hand slowly slid across the gravelly rooftop to tentatively grasp her hand. When she readily laced her fingers with his, his eyes slid shut as absolute satisfaction rushed through him.

Shisui could readily say that today, the first day he really got to share with his soulmate, was one of the happiest of his life.

Shisui was euphoric. Even though he had only held Sakura’s hand as they gazed up at the stars, he could still feel the warmth of her palm burned into his as he walked her back to her apartment.

He was still silently amazed that a hand that was so small and so warm could both take and save lives with such ease.

After their rooftop dinner, their conversation had yet to return to the awkward, stilted nature it had while they sat in the restaurant together. As they walked through downtown Konoha - watching as the

shops closed for the night, soft lights flicking off in the shops and on in the homes they passed - they spoke of happy memories from their childhood.

Shisui told her about adopting Itachi as a little brother when they were children and teaching him sleight of hand. He told her about picnics him and Izumi would have in a small park near the academy and how they would people watch. He told her about memories he had of cooking with his mother before both of his parents died in the Third Shinobi World War.

Sakura told him about how she had been shy and a loner as a child and how her friend Ino helped her come out of her shell. She told him about the hideaway she had in the forest that she filled with flowers, mirrors, and anything pretty she could find. She told him about her friendship with Naruto and Sasuke and how it only grew stronger and stronger as the years progressed.

Even though they had spent hours talking, by the time they finally reached the front door to her apartment, it felt like it had only been minutes.

“Thanks for walking me home, Shisui. You know you didn’t have to do that,” Sakura asserted with a smile as she turned to face him.

“You never know, there could have been a kage level missing ninja waiting to ambush you,” Shisui joked.

“Ah, so it was a safety precaution then,” she laughed.

“Of course. I could never allow my soulmate to be ambushed by some senseless missing ninja after all. The carnage would be too amusing to miss out on,” he lipped in return, earning a snort of amusement from her.

“Then a thank you to my brave spectator,” she hummed softly before stepping forward.

As Sakura came close, her face slowly drawing closer to his, Shisui felt his heart roar to life in his chest. For a few frantic heartbeats as his feet rooted to the ground, he wondered if she would kiss him on the lips. Instead, she tilted her head, pressing a quick peck to his cheek.

Heat rushed through his body, his cheek burning, as she pulled away with a shy smile, an irresistibly cute blush spread across her cheeks. Shisui could do nothing but stare in surprise for a long moment before his fingertips slowly drifted up to touch the spot on his cheek she had kissed, as if to see if his tingling skin was even a part of himself.

A smile slowly spread across his lips as he struggled for words, his earlier wit and teasing gone with the sensation of bliss taking its place.

“I really enjoyed talking to you tonight, Shisui. I had a lot of fun,” Sakura said sincerely as Shisui continued to struggle to gather his thoughts, “We should do it again sometime.”

“I, uh... Yes. And me too. I... Yes,” he stammered out, Sakura hiding her widening grin behind her hand.

“I’m off this Tuesday and I happen to know of a sweets shop that you might like,” she offered, leaning back against the door to her apartment.

“Yes. I would like that. A lot,” he agreed immediately, shaking loose from his stunned state to offer, “Would three o’clock be alright?”

“That’s perfect,” Sakura replied with a smile, reaching into her pocket to pull out the key to her front door, twirling it between her fingertips, “It’s a date then.”

Shisui’s smile only widened before he parroted, “A date then.”

Unlocking the door to her apartment, she swung open the door before turning back to say, “Have a nice night, Shisui.”

“You too... Sakura.”

She gave him one last parting smile before disappearing into her apartment and it was the gentle click of her doorknob snapping shut

that finally snapped him out of his stupor as well. It was only after she shut the door that he realized his fingertips were still lingering on his burning cheek.

Shisui stared at the numbers printed on Sakura's door for a long few moments, overwhelmed by his bliss following one of the happiest days of his life. After finally gathering the will he needed to remove his feet from where they were rooted to the ground and begin his walk home, he thought that nothing could bring down his euphoric mood.

At least until, once he arrived at his home in the Uchiha district, he found a summons from Izumi waiting for him.

Already dressed in his battle garb for his upcoming mission - an investigation into rumors of strange kidnappings in a small town on the border between Fire country and Rain country - Shisui entered the front doors of the hospital. Stopping at the front desk, he adjusted the colorful bouquet in his hands to ask the clerk where he could find Sakura's office.

It was a short elevator ride to one of the top floors of the spacious and spotless hospital and, once he exited the lift, he found he didn't even need to search for the office of the woman exiting one of the patient rooms nearby.

"Sakura," he called out, drawing her attention away from the clipboard in her hands. When her gaze met his, a greeting smile

spread across her lips.

“Shisui,” she returned as she approached, tucking her clipboard under her arm and perching her free hand on her hip, her eyes briefly flicking down to the bouquet in his arms, “What brings you to my neck of the woods?”

“Well, funny story: I came across these flowers and they seemed in desperate need of a home. I can’t take care of them myself but I thought I might know a woman who could,” Shisui joked, presenting her the bundle of flowers in his arm with a flourish.

“I’m a busy woman but I think I could find the time,” she laughed, taking the bouquet from his hands with a warm smile before thanking sincerely, “Thank you, Shisui.”

“There may be a hidden reason behind them, honestly,” he answered, reaching up to scratch his nose in embarrassment.

“Somehow I knew, considering you had to visit with Ino to get these,” Sakura replied, shaking her head in amusement before turning on her heel and walking down the hallway, “Come on, we can talk in my office.”

It was only a short walk to Sakura’s private office, the room decorated simply but with touches of color and nature that were uniquely her. A neat row of potted flowers lined the window at the back of her office, their stems turned towards the sunlight which streamed in through

the open blinds. A colorful water pitcher sat nearby, perched on the window sill next to a hideous statue of a frog.

A row of bookshelves took up one wall of the room, loaded down with heavy texts and scrolls that made the shelves bend precariously at the middle. The other wall was decorated with obviously hand drawn pictures and paintings, perhaps from young patients she had tended to in the past. A simple desk stood in the center of the room, an organized collection of opened books, scrolls, and notes spread out across the surface and interspersed with empty coffee cups from the hospital kitchen downstairs.

While Sakura fished out a vase from one of the bottom drawers of her desk and filled it with water from the pitcher on the window sill, she mused, "I'm still surprised you and Ino get along so well."

"I think part of it is that she can smell my fear and knows I'm not a threat," Shisui answered, softly closing the door to her office.

Snorting in amusement, she deposited the bouquet into the vase, arranging the stems and petals before placing it on her desk with a smile. "So, what's the hidden reason for the flowers? Especially since you had to brave the deadly predator."

"They're actually apology flowers..." he admitted, "Sorry. I can't make it to our date on Tuesday because I have a mission but I'll be back home next week. Could we reschedule for then?"

“I might have said no but you did bring the appropriate apology flowers,” Sakura answered, leaning against the edge of her desk and folding her hands across her chest.

“So, is that a yes? Since I brought the proper offering?” Shisui returned hopefully.

“Yes, it’s a yes,” she laughed before adding on seriously, “But you have to be safe, okay?”

A wide smile spread across his lips.

“Always am!” he promised.

It had only been four days since Shisui’s departure but Sakura could not stop thinking about him. Ever since their night on the rooftop, sharing a meal and talking about their lives, Sakura had finally been able feel hopeful about her future with her soulmate. She had kept her secret for years, something that had left her feeling anxious and ashamed even with her numerous accomplishments.

She had once wondered if she would have ever been able to face him and what kind of person he truly was.

After their date under the stars and after finally getting to see a part of who he truly was, she found that she was excited to finally get to truly know her soulmate. He was a kind, sincere, and - surprisingly enough for an Uchiha - funny man. She enjoyed his presence and their talks and she was delighted to find that maybe the gods did have a plan for her after all.

Sakura couldn't wait for their date later that week and, for the first time since she found her soulmark as a young girl, she found herself giddy over the thought of love.

Even her coworkers and trainees at the hospital had caught on to her unusually bubbly attitude, some like Shizune even going as far as to tease her about her soulmate and their growing bond. Sakura would have normally been embarrassed by the attention being drawn to her private life but she found that nothing could disturb her blissful little bubble.

Or so she had thought until that night after she had finally finished her shift at the hospital.

The day had been uneventful enough. A handful of chunin had made their way through her doors that afternoon after having been injured in simple sparring matches that morning. A Nara was staying the night, due to give birth in the early hours of the morning, and an aspiring shinobi had broken their ankle during a fall in an obstacle course at the academy.

Despite the day having been slow and thankfully unexciting, Sakura

couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. While everything was calm in the hospital and the village, an instinctual feeling of danger continued to plague her - a feeling so similar to the gut instinct that she had honed over decades of training in the shinobi arts and one that was impossible to ignore when one was a ninja, and a medical ninja, of her caliber. The irking sensation refused to abate, a nagging itch in the back of her mind that had her nerves and her heart on edge for the entirety of the day.

She knew something was wrong but it wasn't until, as she was heading towards the sliding glass doors to exit the hospital and she was met by three groups of medical ninja frantically carting in the broken, burned, and bleeding bodies of half an ANBU squad, that she came to the horrifying realization of what it was.

Sakura watched as the teams frantically rushed passed her, sprinting towards the operating rooms, her wide eyes flicking across the mutilated and unconscious bodies staining the crisp white hospital sheets below them. When the third team rushed passed her and her eyes fell upon the mangled patient in the bed, when she recognized the face of Shisui through the blood and dirt splattered across his face, her heart felt as if it stopped in her chest.

There was a moment where all she could do was stare as disbelief and panic rushed through her in one cacophonous burst. A moment where all she could think was that it couldn't be him, it shouldn't be him. A moment where a very real fear ran across her skin like freezing water.

She couldn't lose him. Not like this. Not when she finally got to be with him.

Without a second thought, she ran forward, chasing after the team of medical ninja who rushed her soulmate to the elevators.

“What’s his condition?” Sakura demanded as she barged into the elevator with them, the doors closing behind her as she already reached out to assess him, her hands glowing green with chakra.

“Lady Sakura, you can’t be here,” one of the medical ninja tried to assert, “You know the hospital rules, you can’t treat your soulmate.”

“I am the most skilled medical ninja in this hospital if not the most in all five nations. I am the best equipped to handle his case and I will be taking charge of his care. If you want to stop me, *you can try to remove me yourself*,” Sakura growled in return, the young medical ninja retreating from the fire in her eyes and the venom in her voice.

Despite the half dozen other shinobi in the elevator, none bothered to challenge her in her assumption of Shisui’s care. Whether it be from the understanding that she was the best person to take his case or whether they feared her very real threat, she didn’t care. All she cared about in that moment was her soulmate’s fading heartbeat beneath her hands and the frantic rush as they sprinted Shisui to the first open operating room in the OR.

The world surround Sakura became nothing more than a muted blur as they barged into the operating room, the voices and frantic movement around her fading into the background as the entirety of her attention focused in on her soulmate. The actions of the medical ninja around her - the hanging of bags upon bags of fresh blood, the injection of a half dozen different medications, the equipment being strapped to Shisui, and the rush of activity around her - were nothing more than

static as she pressed her chakra into Shisui and began her desperate treatment.

When she became fully aware of his condition - of the burns covering his body, the lacerations strewn across his skin, the broken bones, the bleeding vessels, the punctured lung, the mangled organs, the minuscule chakra remaining in the overworked pathways mapping his body - she couldn't understand how he had survived so long. When she used a chakra scalpel just to drain the rapidly accumulating blood from his lungs and when she began the hopeless task of mending together the tattered veins and arteries that gushed blood faster than they could pump it back into his body, she refused to allow her fear to surface.

When she was forced to activate her Strength of a Hundred seal, thick black lines rushing down her face, across her arms, and spanning across his body as she used her Creation Rebirth technique for the first time since her battle with Sasori all those years ago, the only thing she allowed herself to feel was determination.

She would never let him die. Not again. Never again.

She would not lose him a second time.

At first, there was nothing. Not even the comfort of darkness or silence, simply a sensation of complete nothingness...

A gentle beeping. The sound of muted footsteps. Far away voices. The scent of antiseptic. The smell of disinfectant. A waft of flowers. The taste of blood and ash and dirt.

Each sensation returned but not with a sudden burst of awareness. Rather, it came at a snail's pace, each sound, smell, and taste coming back as if being learned for the first time.

A soft breeze of cold air. A gentle weight at his side. A warmth surrounding his hand.

A woman crying.

As the sound of hushed sobs and quiet sniffles met his ears, Shisui felt as if he was finally returning to himself; as if he was abandoning that empty place he had once inhabited. He wanted to compare it to waking up from a dream but it felt as if there had been nothing where he once was.

All he knew was that there was something in this world of confusing sounds and smells that needed him, something passed the taste of a lost battle lingering behind his teeth and the conflicting chill and warmth racing across skin he was still relearning how to feel with.

When Shisui first forced his heavy eyelids to open, fighting against the

grit still lingering, he was met with a nonsensical blur of light and color that had his eyelids falling shut once again. After a handful of heartbeats that he could feel thrumming through every vein in his body, and with unwitting encouragement from the gently crying woman, he opened his eyes once again, blinking passed the muddy vision before him until his sight returned.

Once his sight finally cleared enough to make sense to his duly burning eyes, he was greeted by a splash of pink folded over at his bedside, candy-colored locks trailing across the off-white blanket loosely covering his chest. Even with his vision returned, even with all sensation sluggishly returning to his muddled mind, it took a dozen more heartbeats before he finally understood that Sakura was crying at his bedside.

Shisui opened his mouth to speak but he struggled for a handful of moments to think of the words he wanted to say and even longer to finally form them.

“Please don’t cry...”

When he finally spoke, it was muted and weak but his words caused her head to slowly rise from its position on his chest either way. Sakura gazed up at him, tears still slipping free from her eyes and staining her cheeks, her lips parted in hope and shock as their eyes met from what felt like both a million miles and only a hair's breadth away.

“Shi...sui...” she whispered, her words barely more than a breath.

Unsure of what to even say to console her and unable to come up with the words he desperately wanted just so she would please stop crying... Shisui offered her a smile that came out as little more than a quirk of his lip.

Sakura's face contorted as if she had been wounded, a fresh wave of tears rushing down her face as she shot forward, pressing herself against him as she pressed her lips against his with a desperation and a relief that made his sluggish heart begin to race in his chest.

It wasn't the romantic first kiss he had always imagined.

His mouth tasted like blood and ash and he couldn't remember the last time he had taken a shower. He felt gritty from dirt, sweat, and blood. He still hurt, an aching pain throbbing across every inch of his skin. Her face was red and puffy from crying. She reeked of antiseptic and latex. Her cheeks were wet and cold from tears and she couldn't control her hiccups even as they kissed for the first time.

Even so... Shisui couldn't have pictured anything sweeter in that moment.

When they finally parted, Sakura pressed her forehead to his with a gasp of air, still fighting her sniffles and trying to hold back her tears with eyes wrenched shut. With what strength he could gather, he slowly lifted his hand to cradle her face, her wet cheeks cold even against his freezing hand.

“Sakura...” he breathed as their eyes finally slid open to meet once again.

“Please don’t ever do that to me again...” she whimpered softly as he gazed into her shining viridian eyes as if looking into the heart of who she was.

Looking into the eyes of his soulmate, seeing passed all of her barriers and seeing her at her most vulnerable made his heart clench in his chest. He would do anything to never see her like this again, to never see her so broken hearted and raw. He would do anything to never be the cause of such sorrow again.

“I promise,” he whispered back, brushing his thumb across her cheek as their eyes slid shut once again to simply bask in the warmth of being together, safe, and alive.

Chapter End Notes

The sakes I listed that were served at the restaurant are some of the most expensive I could find. I know very little about sake so I’m just hoping I didn’t mess up their names too much! Juyondai 'Ryusen' Junmai Daiginjo sake goes for over \$5000 a bottle, Juyondai 'Sichitare Nijikkan' Junmai Daiginjo sake sells for over \$700 a bottle, Gozenshu 'Bodaimoto' Nigori Junmai sake costs over \$600 a bottle, and Midorikawa Daiginjo sake is almost \$200 a bottle.

Jiaozi are a kind of dumpling that are usually filled with some kind of meat and vegetables and are boiled, steamed, fried, or even grilled. Umeshu is a kind of Japanese liquor made from plums and sugar. I imagine this would be Sakura’s favorite kind of sake since one of her favorite foods are umeboshi (pickled plums).

Toka, Sakura's great-grandmother, is one of Hashirama's cousins and one of his closest advisors. She is only given a brief frame in both the anime and the manga but she is given more of a backstory in the databooks.

I'm not sure if anyone pieced it together but the people behind these mysterious kidnappings that Shisui was sent to investigate were "Tobi" and Zetsu. With half of the Akatsuki having been annihilated in this AU, they are desperately struggling to enact their plans, something more frequently met with disaster.

Amaya, the name of the hostess at the restaurant, means "night rain". It is because of this that I gave her a navy colored kimono with silver thread, colors that reflect this. Kasumi, her and her wife's daughter, means "mist".

Soulmates

Chapter Notes

After a fully unintentional seven month lull (WHOOOPS), I finally finished up work on this chapter! I had pushed this story onto the back burner to instead focus on my degree then my other stories then my cosplay then my partner or my family then something else to the point where, when someone wished me a happy anniversary for this story, I realized how long I had brushed off this fic in favor of other promises and projects.

Originally, there was only supposed to be five chapters but the final chapter became far too long. So, I broke it up into this chapter and the final one which I'll be publishing some time in the future! (Hopefully not in another seven months, yikes.) Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A few days after Shisui's emergency surgery and after he was finally cleared to be discharged, he found himself being led to Sakura's home. Despite her assertion that he was well enough to leave the hospital, she was still insistent on being the one to keep an eye on him while he continued to heal.

Shisui knew that he could have easily argued that he felt fine or that one of his many family members could keep an eye on him but he was far happier to be able to stay by Sakura's side. He could think of far worse fates than being doted on by his soulmate as he returned to his prime.

Not to mention that he could easily sense Sakura's worry barely hidden just beneath the surface of their interactions. He realized with no small amount of unease that this was the third time she had nearly lost him to death and he couldn't begin to understand the anxiety she must be feeling. Even though they had only been on one date and even though they were just finally getting to know each other, the last thing he wanted was for her to be unhappy.

When Sakura brought him into her apartment, leading him up a set of stairs he was already familiar with and through a door he had seen plenty of times from the outside, he found himself greedily absorbing every detail of his soulmate's home.

While her furniture was of simple design and her home itself was painted in neutral hues, bright shocks of color in the form of her many decorations were splashed throughout the warm space. He was amused to find that Sakura had a messy side when he noticed the haphazard pile of shoes by the door and the pile of dirty coffee cups dominating a desk across the room.

He was briefly amazed by the sheer quantity of books and scrolls which overflowed out of a large bookcase, the trove of knowledge extending onto her desk where it intermingled with the hoard of coffee cups. A neat line of potted succulents sat on the window above her desk and framed a small planter filled with strange plants he couldn't recognize, the green space infinitely more organized than the mess of paper beneath it.

When his gaze fell to a small collection of weapons on display on her wall, curiosity welled up within him as well. He immediately recognized one of the carefully suspended weapons although the others on the wall were unknown to him - some even outright confusing.

While Shisui wished that he had finally been able to see the inside of Sakura's home under better circumstances, he found himself unable to complain. More than anything, he was happy to learn more about his soulmate and was satisfied to learn that the loosely organized chaos of her home fit perfectly with what he knew of her as a person.

"Are you in the mood for anything specific?" Sakura asked, drawing his attention away from his perusal of her home and back to her.

Pausing momentarily in confusion, he innocently asked, "In regards to...?"

She rolled her eyes as she headed into the kitchen. "Dinner of course."

"Are you going to cook for me?" he continued with a smile, the thought that she would go out of her way to cook for him making his heart swell.

"Well, I was going to cook for myself and thought I'd include you," she sassed with a smirk.

"Then I suppose I'll be lucky enough to get some scraps of whatever you make for yourself," he joked in return, making her smile warm, "I'll happily eat whatever you put in front of me."

"Make yourself at home," Sakura hummed as she busied herself with looking through her refrigerator, "I'll see what I can do."

Doing just that, Shisui made a beeline to the various weapons Sakura had hanging on her wall like trophies, intent on satisfying his curiosity. He examined the three bladed scythe that once belonged to the now dead Jashinist Hidan, an infamous missing ninja who was finally killed by Sakura, Sasuke, and Naruto years ago. He noticed a few experimental notches taken out of the blades and the neatly coiled cable connected to the weapon and assumed that the weapon had found its way into Sakura's possession as she experimented on it.

Hoping the weapon was as dormant and unassuming as it appeared, he moved along the line.

The next weapon took much longer to recognize, the strangely segmented metal tipped with a deadly yet unusual blade being unlike any weapon he had ever seen. When his gaze dipped down to the opposite end of the weapon and found it broken, he realized that it was just one part of a much larger piece. It was only a moment later that he realized who this device had once belonged to: the S-class criminal whose defeat had put Sakura in the bingo book, Sasori of the Red Sand.

Silently musing over whether his soulmate's collection was purely experimental or if a bloodthirsty pride was hidden within her, he studied the other weapons hanging along the wall with curiosity but without recognition. Passing by Sakura's deadly assortment, he found himself investigating her bookshelf, spotting a handful of framed pictures perched on top of the overflowing shelf.

The first was the traditional genin squadron photo that was taken when a person first became a shinobi and joined a genin team. Sakura and Naruto's smiling faces beamed out of the photo as they crushed a smirking Sasuke in the middle of a group embrace. Even Kakashi - a normally aloof and calculating man - smiled at the camera, his arms perched on top of all of their heads as he leaned on top of them. Another picture stood beside it in a much newer frame, this one a near identical copy of the first although it was all four of them as adults, joyously smiling into the camera as they recreated their first photo.

There was an aged photo of Sakura as a child wrapped up in the arms of two people who Shisui assumed were her parents; the woman was planting a kiss on Sakura's cheek while the man held bunny ears over the woman's head, his other arm wrapped around them both. It was perched on the shelf alongside a much newer picture of them all proudly standing together, Sakura dressed in a flak jacket and holding a scroll signifying her new rank as Chunin.

Beside that was a snapshot of Sakura holding up a celebratory drink alongside a scroll marked with the seal of Jonin. Her teacher, the legendary Lady Tsunade, and Shizune, Tsunade's niece and a talented healer, joyously held up drinks of their own. The three of them looked

like they were all already well on their way to being drunk, their cheeks flushed red and uninhibited smiles stretched across their faces.

Next on the shelf was a photo of Sakura with a large group of women gathered around a table at a restaurant, all of whom Shisui recognized as being enormously powerful and successful kunoichi. He spotted the Hyuga clan head Hinata Hyuga at one end of the table and the ANBU weapon supplier Tenten beside her. Ibiki's apprentice and the woman who was taking over as Director of the Torture and Interrogation Department, Ino Yamanaka, sat on the other end of the table next to Suna's bloodthirsty general, Temari of the Sand. In between them all at the head of the table sat Sakura, a bingo book open to her page sitting on the table between all of them.

Recognizing this scene as being one mirrored in his own past, he realized that the women were celebrating Sakura's induction into the bingo book following her defeat of Sasori of the Red Sand.

Continuing onward, his eyes flicked across the other snapshots from Sakura's life. One was a candid shot with Kakashi and another was a humorous picture with a young man who Shisui immediately recognized as the taijutsu master Rock Lee. There was an absurdly dangerous photo of a training session with Suna's poison and puppet expert Lady Chiyo while another was a shockingly domestic moment with the current Kazekage Gaara.

The final was a group picture of more than a dozen people, nearly all the faces pictured sporting a smile whether it be beaming or reserved. He was surprised to notice that he recognized all of the people in the photo, Konoha and Suna shinobi alike. Many of them were S-class shinobi with their own personal pages in the bingo book and even those who weren't were legends in their own pursuits. Sakura herself was in no way out of place, now widely recognized in all five great nations as the most skilled medical ninja and the most deadly kunoichi in the world.

Smiling widely himself as he continued his investigation of her bookshelf, Shisui realized just how much Sakura's bonds meant to her based solely off of the photos she displayed so proudly.

Unsurprised to find that the majority of the content tucked into the shelves were related to medicine or poisons, he was surprised to find the series of books written by Jiraiya. Plucking the first in the series off of the bookshelf out of curiosity, he wondered if what he had been told about the books was wrong. He had always been informed that they were plotless smut but, having found the series on Sakura's shelf, he questioned the validity of what he had been told.

Flipping open the book to the first page, he immediately found that what he had been told was in fact quite accurate and that it hadn't even touched upon how extraordinarily explicit the text was. Cheeks burning, he stuffed the book back into its place on the shelf, silently gawking at the seven other novels written by the Toad Sage.

Now satisfied with his perusal of Sakura's living room, Shisui invited himself into her kitchen, deciding that he would rather make himself useful with cooking than wait on her like some kind of leech.

"Hey, what did I say about making yourself comfortable?" Sakura scolded as she continued work cutting an assortment of vegetables.

"I'd be much more comfortable if I could help you cook for us," he answered, leaning against the counter next to her.

She shook her head in amusement. "You can start on the rice if you want then."

Working together and chatting along the way, it was little time before they had prepared a steaming meal of curried vegetables and rice. As

they loaded up their plates and sat at the kitchen table, Shisui noticed that their dinner smelled somehow off. The spices in the food were so powerful that they burned his nose but, despite his discomfort, he refused to speak of it. He was so happy to spend time with her that the last thing he wanted to do was upset her by criticizing her cooking.

“Thank you for the food,” they both chimed in unison before scooping up two spoonfuls and taking a bite.

Only for them both to choke on their bites.

“Holy *shit*,” Shisui cursed reflexively around his mouthful of curry before he could even think to contain his response, rapidly reaching for his glass of water to drown the spiciest food he had ever eaten in his life.

Sakura, unable to even get out any words in her haste to grab her drink, drained her own glass to chase away the sheer power of the spices in the curry they had made together.

“Lee told me this would be a spicy dish but sweet gods, that’s inedible,” she finally got out as she set her empty glass down on the table, still breathing as if to blow off the heat of the meal, “He said it helps him recover so I thought I’d give it a shot...”

“That is very powerful,” Shisui tacked on before sheepishly apologizing, “Er, and sorry... I really appreciate you cooking... this.”

Sakura looked up to meet his eyes but, instead of anger or upset there, he found mirth. Hiding a snort of amusement behind her hand, he couldn’t help but chuckle in return.

“I think I’ll just order takeout and we can call it a night,” she finally suggested, already gathering up their full plates.

“Something not spicy, please,” Shisui teased as she loaded the nearly untouched food into plastic containers.

After eating a delivered meal of udon and onigiri and some fresh fruit from Sakura’s own kitchen, Shisui and Sakura found themselves chatting as they sat at the dining room table. They covered a wide variety of topics both mundane and unusual from their least favorite foods to preferred weather and from their proudest moments in combat to their funniest experience during training.

They were so wrapped up in one another's company that they didn't bother to move to the couch, the only thing finally snapping them out of their focus on each other being Sakura looking up at the clock and commenting on the time. Stating that she needed to take a shower and that she would leave out some bathroom supplies for him, Shisui realized that they had neglected to stop by his home in its entirety to gather any of his things.

As Sakura excused herself to the back of her home, the opening and closing of multiple doors suggesting she had made a brief stop in her bedroom, Shisui briefly considered using his flash step to make a stop at his own home. Knowing that Sakura would be furious with him for using such an advanced technique so soon out of the hospital, he brushed away the stray thought and instead waited patiently.

When she emerged from the bathroom a short while later, a towel draped across her shoulders as she dried her hair, the scent of her floral soaps clung to her glowing skin. Shisui cleared his throat as his

gaze briefly dipped down to her sleeping clothes - a sleeveless top with the Haruno clan crest printed on the front and a pair of shorts. Despite knowing how innocuous such an interaction was, he couldn't help but feel that seeing her in such a casual state was very intimate.

"All yours," Sakura called out as she walked into the kitchen and pulled a glass from the cupboard, "I left you some clothes and a fresh towel in the bathroom."

"Ah, thank you," he replied as she filled the glass with a pitcher from her fridge. Lingered awkwardly for a few moments, he finally silently nodded to himself before making his way into the bathroom as well.

The steam and the clean smell of the bathroom made his head feel lighter as he closed the bathroom door behind him, his gaze drifting across the small, simply decorated room. He immediately spotted a spare toothbrush and folded set of clothes on the counter, only briefly confused by the sight of his family's crest before realizing these were likely a spare set of Sasuke's sleeping clothes.

Taking a deep breath and shaking his head at his own ridiculous reaction to such an innocuous situation, he took a moment to relieve himself before turning the knobs to the shower. Already heated water shot out from the shower head, still warm from Sakura's shower not a few minutes ago, and it took little time for him to remove his clothes and fold them in a neat pile on the bathroom counter.

Without a second thought, Shisui stepped into the warm spray of water, already sighing in satisfaction as the hot water soaked his hair and cascaded down his still sore skin. After taking a minute to bask in the unbridled bliss that came from finally taking a steaming hot shower after the lukewarm showers at the hospital, he realized that the only soaps available to him were the ones Sakura herself had used.

Mentally shrugging, he gladly relegated himself to smelling like a moonlit dream - a scent that while abstractly named smelled absolutely incredible - in exchange for feeling clean. Sakura's soaps were of infinite better quality than the tiny bottles of body wash provided by the hospital and they were something he found relishing as he enjoyed the heat melting away the lingering tension in his still healing body

Finishing his basking, he turned off the spray of water and used the fresh towel Sakura had set out for him to dry off. Satisfied to find that Sasuke's spare nightclothes fit - although they were a little tight around the shoulders - he took a minute to brush his teeth as well.

When Shisui finally emerged from the bathroom, he was surprised to find that all of the lights in the apartment were off save for the ones in her bedroom. Confused, he approached her bedroom but paused outside of the door, unsure if he was allowed to enter. Placing his hand on the doorframe, he leaned in and readily spotted Sakura sitting in bed with a book propped up against her knees.

She looked up from her book to him and smiled shyly, marking her page with her finger. Before he could speak, she reached out and patted the bed next to her. When his surprised gaze snapped back up to her to confirm her request, she glanced off to the side, a blush decorating her cheeks.

Unsure of what to say in response, he simply closed the bedroom door behind him and tentatively slipped into bed next to her. Setting down her book on her nightstand, his heart skipped a beat in it's rapid pace as Sakura hesitantly nestled up against him. Each brush of cloth and warm flesh against his still sore skin felt like a brand but, even still, he readily opened his embrace and accepted her into it.

Shisui's heart pounded in his ears but the feeling of her hummingbird heartbeat against his chest brought him a sense of comfort as he realized her heart raced as well.

Slowly, not sure if it was allowed, he wrapped his arm around her. Her silent encouragement came in the form of her spanning her fingers across his collarbone and his shoulder and brushing her fingertips across his clothed skin. The air between them remained still and quiet as they slowly grew more comfortable just being close, their heartbeats settling into a soothing rhythm as her thumb drifted across his pectoral where they both knew his soulmark was printed.

“I actually feel pretty bad for giving you such a shitty soulmark,” Sakura finally commented, breaking not only the silence but the emotional tension between them as Shisui immediately burst into laughter.

“What!? I am sorry! That’s an awful sentence to have as your soulmark!” she declared, sitting up to glare down at him as he laughed, “I feel bad that I- hey, stop laughing, I’m trying to be serious!”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Shisui apologized as he tried shook his head, able to stop his laughter but not his smile as he looked up at her, “Honestly, I’m not upset about it. If anything, I’m happy it was something so ridiculous. There was and is no doubt in my mind that you are my soulmate.”

Sakura was silent for a long moment, as if struggling for words, before she settled on a smile so full of warmth that it makes his heart ache.

“I’m happy to hear that,” she hummed simply, as if he had relieved a great weight from her shoulders, before she briefly leaned across the bed to flip off the lights.

When she entered back into his embrace, this time with much more

confidence, Shisui was eager to accept her. As they lied together in the dark of her bedroom, the only sounds were the soothing backdrop of her ceiling fan, the muted sounds of the city outside, and their quiet breathing. Despite how unfamiliar this situation was and despite his lingering nerves around his soulmate as they continued to learn more about one another, he found himself easily becoming relaxed.

He briefly wondered if he was able to be so comfortable around her because they were destined for one another.

This time, it was Shisui who broke the silence between them. "I'm happy I'm here with you."

He felt as Sakura's nestled closer to him and, when she spoke, he could hear the smile in her voice. "Me too."

Easily becoming lost in the soothing rhythm of her breathing, the soft thrum of her heartbeat, and her warmth, her presence against him lulled him into the most comfortable sleep he had had since he was a child.

Shisui's blissful sleep was aggressively interrupted early that morning by the jarring sound of rapid knocks on the door leading to Sakura's balcony.

Both Shisui and Sakura jolted up in bed, alarmed by the demanding knocks on the sliding glass door not even ten feet away.

"Sakura! Sakuraa, wake up! I have amazing news!" the unfamiliar voice of a woman yelled from behind the concealing curtains as she

continued to pound on the glass, “Damnit, forehead, get up!”

Sighing softly and shaking her head, Sakura pulled herself out of bed and padded over to the sliding glass door. Opening the curtains and then the sliding glass door just enough to greet her friend, Shisui was surprised when a blonde woman threw open the door and let herself in with the same confidence as if she owned the place.

Sakura shot him an apologetic look as the woman who he finally recognized as Ino Yamanaka began to gush.

“You won’t believe it, it finally happened! I found my soulmate! I mean, I always knew that it would be after I took over as director of the Torture and Interrogation Department but I was still-” she sung before she followed her friend’s line of sight and spotted Shisui still lying in bed, “Oh!”

Instinctively, Shisui pulled up the blanket to cover his still clothed chest, feeling exposed as the interrogator he had only met a handful of times on a professional basis eyed him over. The blonde turned to give Sakura a saucy look, one eyebrow arched high, as she perched a hand on her hip.

“You know, I knew it wouldn’t take long to get in his pants considering how cute he is but I’m impressed it was this fast!” Ino taunted with a laugh, both Shisui and Sakura flushing bright red.

“T-that’s not what happened at all!” Sakura argued hotly, stuttering in her embarrassment.

“Are you sure he was ready though, didn’t he just get out of the hospital? Ah, what am I saying, you probably just healed up whatever you did to him, huh?” she continued to tease, her foxlike smirk only

widening as Sakura's face grew redder.

"We didn't- ugh! Mind your own business, Ino-pig!"

"There's no need to be embarrassed! I'm giving Sai one month to make his move before I corner him myself!"

"I'm not embar- wait, did you just say *Sai* ? That asshole is your soulmate?"

"Hey, he's not an asshole! He's an *artist* ," Ino sighed romantically in response.

"I'm just, ah, I'm going to... go..." Shisui muttered as he slowly slipped out of bed, trying to skirt beneath the radars of the two women arguing in the middle of the bedroom.

"Wait, Shisui," Sakura called out in a much more gentle tone although the sharp gaze of the blonde still left him on edge, "Are you sure?"

Raking his hand through his messy hair, he offered his soulmate a comforting smile.

"I need to go check in with Itachi and Izumi about a few things today. I should have done it yesterday but I was, er..." Feeling Ino's prying gaze, he fumbled over the word 'distracted'. "I should have talked to them yesterday."

"Are you feeling alright though?" she pressed, concern in her eyes as

she looked up at him, "I don't want you pushing yourself. You're still healing."

"I feel great," Shisui assured, "I'll be careful. Promise."

"I understand... Just come back later tonight, okay?"

He smiled. "I will."

Leaning down to give her a farewell kiss, Shisui paused as he glanced up at Ino who still watched them with a smirk on her face. Sakura, an expression of displeasure on her face, turned to shoot her friend a warning look. Huffing in amusement, Ino shook her head and walked out of the room, heading into the living room to give them their privacy.

When he turned to face her again, she leaned up to press a lingering kiss to his lips that made his heart swell in his chest. When she pulled away, looking up at him with her bright viridian eyes, the warmth in his chest only grew. He looked down at his soulmate - her tangled hair, sleep marks on her cheek from her pillow, and her face clear of makeup - and could see nothing but how beautiful she was.

"I'll let myself out the back so you can have your privacy," he finally hummed, struck by how much her kiss and her presence affected him.

"You better not miss dinner," Sakura warned in a teasing tone.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Shisui replied cheekily, leaning down to steal one more lingering kiss that made his heart leap in his chest.

After fully recovering at her apartment for a week following Ino's surprise visit, Shisui was placed back on the mission roster and sent on an A rank mission. Despite knowing that her soulmate was fully recovered and more than capable of finishing his mission, Sakura found herself worrying about him.

She had nearly lost him three times already, three times too many for her comfort and peace of mind. She could not handle another scare like that and, with him gone on a mission, she found herself fretting over his safety.

Sakura knew the dangers of being a shinobi. She knew the dangers that they both faced - that they both chose to face - as ninja. Even so, all of the logic in the world couldn't reason away the anxiety that was a constant weight on her heart. Even more than that, his two recent brushes with death turned her attention back onto the question she had had since she first lost him at the tender age of eight.

"Sakura! It's been some time!"

Mentally shaking herself to bring her focus back to her job - back to her patients and her promise to herself and to them, Sakura looked up to her newest patient. Closing the door behind her, she smiled widely and propped a hand on her hip.

"It's been too long, Lee," she greeted warmly, happy to see one of her most cherished friends in what felt like a lifetime, "I'd say I'm excited to see you but I wish it was under better circumstances."

"This is nothing! I've sustained much worse injuries simply training

with Guy-sensei,” Lee attempted to comfort although his words did little to assuage her concern over his bruised and unnaturally crooked forearm.

“Your arm is obviously broken,” she deadpanned although she couldn’t flatten the amused quirk at the edge of her lip.

“Better than both arms!”

Sakura snorted as she stepped forward, setting his chart on the bedside table. “I can’t argue that.”

“So, what happened this time around?” she asked curiously, her hands glowing green with healing chakra as she began her assessment.

“Ah, nothing extraordinary. I found myself battling a boss summon and it threw me through an oak. I believe it was... a bear? Or was it a badger? Perhaps a wolverine?”

“Leave it to you to be more concerned about what kind of animal it was instead of the fact you fought a boss summon,” she laughed as she located three distinct breaks in the two bones of his forearm.

“I had the easy job, honestly. My captain, Shisui the Teleporter, fought the summoner and they were much more intimidating,” Lee answered vehemently, “Have you ever seen someone fight with five swords? I want to learn how.”

“Oh, you were with Shisui? That’s actually comforting, knowing you were on his team,” Sakura commented, feeling a wave of relief knowing that someone as skilled as Lee had been fighting alongside

her soulmate.

“You know him? Ah, how silly of me, he was Sasuke’s sensei. I can see how you would have met.” He nodded sagely to himself, proud at having thought to determine the hidden link.

“Yes, that too, but... Well, it has been a long time since we’ve talked... Lee. Shisui is my soulmate.”

“Oh! Truly!?” Lee shouted excitedly, beaming up at her as he quickly reaching out with the hand of his unbroken arm to grasp her hand, “The fates have truly smiled down upon you, Sakura, for you to find your one true love in the springtime of your youth! I couldn’t be happier to hear that such a beloved friend and comrade has found true happiness in the heart of someone so honorable!”

Sakura laughed at Lee exuberance before smiling brightly and squeezing his hand. “That means so much coming from you, Lee. Thank you.”

“Of course! We must celebrate! How does a thirty mile run around the village sound?” he suggested with a glint in his eye.

“How about we get dinner soon instead? Catch up?” she suggested instead.

“Would you be opposed to an eating contest? A new sushi restaurant opened up near the monument and your meal is free if you finish ten plates! Choji already set a record of seventy-four plates!”

“How about I eat a plate but I cheer you on while you try to beat

Choji's record?"

"A fantastic idea! Let's go this weekend! I'm sure you will want to see your beloved tonight after he finishes his debrief with Commander Izumi!"

"Sounds like a plan. I'm really looking forward to it," Sakura answered, before holding out her hands, "Now let me see that arm so I can fix you up and send you on your way."

When Sakura's shift finally ended that night, she felt on top of the world.

Not only did she get to see one of her most treasured friends - a loved one she had had since she was a genin - and make plans to catch up that weekend but Shisui was home safe. Deciding that she would stop by her home to wash up and get changed first, she planned on stopping by to pick up dinner for her and Shisui and surprising him.

Part of her expected that Shisui himself might surprise her after work but she had not expected to be intercepted as she left her apartment by Naruto and Sasuke instead.

Smiling as she was finally met with her brother for the first time in nearly a year, her ecstatic greeting died in her throat when she saw the hesitant expression on Sasuke's face. Her gaze snapped over to Naruto's face, his irritated expression only further compounding her confusion.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

“There’s nothing wrong, precisely. I...” Sasuke fumbled with his words for a moment, Sakura’s eyebrows furrowing even further at his unusual behavior

“Spit it out already!” Naruto huffed, crossing his arms across his chest.

When Sasuke didn’t even react to Naruto’s demand, still looking to be lost in a concerned thought, Sakura’s confusion and worry only amplified.

“Just come with me,” Sasuke finally decided before turning on his foot and heading down the stairs from Sakura’s apartment without another word.

Looking over the Naruto, hoping for some sort of explanation, the blond only shrugged dramatically before sighing and following after the Uchiha. Sakura followed behind although she caught Naruto by the back of the shirt and pulled him backwards to talk, letting their chosen brother lead them in the direction of the Uchiha compound.

“What’s going on? Did he tell you anything?” Sakura asked softly, concern in her voice.

“He just grabbed me on my way to dinner with Hinata and told me he needed me. He didn’t even say anything, he didn’t even explain why he’s back right now. He just took me to your place,” Naruto explained, frustrated, before groaning sadly, “I could be eating ramen with Hinata right now and that asshole won’t even tell me anything...”

“Wasn’t he due back a few months from now? It must be something urgent?”

“Yeah, it’s really weird,” he grumbled before loudly stage whispering, “It would be great if he told us *anything* .”

When Sasuke remained silent, nothing in his stance even suggesting he even heard him, both Sakura and Naruto frowned.

“Maybe he finally found his soulmate?” Sakura thought aloud, “These things always seem to happen in threes and Ino found hers a couple weeks ago.”

Naruto scowled. “You mean that creepy guy Sai? No thanks. Hopefully Sasuke’s soulmate isn’t an asshole like him.”

Sakura grumbled softly, “Agreed.”

Sighing in unison, the two finally walked forward to stand at Sasuke’s sides, both of them looking up to their closest friend but finding nothing but the same distracted hesitation as before.

“You owe me a ramen dinner,” Naruto sighed dramatically as they finally entered into the Uchiha compound.

Waving politely to a few Uchiha walking the streets in their familiar neighborhood, Sakura followed Sasuke to the front door of his even more familiar home. Having long since moved out of his parents’ home in the center of their small community in favor of a quaint house on the outskirts, Sasuke’s home was one that was rarely utilized considering his lengthy travels.

As such, it was strange to see the lights within his home were already on but even stranger when he opened the already unlocked door.

The group slipped off their shoes next to the door, Sasuke hanging his cloak. Still confused but now curious, they followed Sasuke deeper into his home but, before he slid open the sliding door leading into his living room, he paused.

“There's someone I want you both to meet,” Sasuke finally said, sliding open the door without giving them a moment to react.

Sakura and Naruto both looked into the livingroom and were met by the sight of a woman around their age with fiery red hair standing awkwardly in the middle of the living room. The woman appeared to be nervous, one arm wrapped around herself and the other reaching up to adjust a pair of square frame glasses. Her vivid crimson gaze flicked away from them to briefly land on Sasuke and, when their eyes met, her shoulders squared.

Looking to Sakura and Naruto with far more confidence in her eyes, she cleared her throat and raised one hand in greeting. “Um... hello?”

Sakura and Naruto looked up to their closest friend, their expressions a mix of amazement and befuddlement.

“Sakura, Naruto: This is Karin. She's a new addition to the village and...” Sasuke began before pausing to turn to them, a smile slowly growing, “She’s my soulmate.”

A heavy silence hung in the air for a handful of heartbeats before both her and Naruto loudly cried out in excitement, rushing forward to greet Sasuke’s soulmate.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Karin! Welcome to the village,” Sakura greeted warmly, her heart full to bursting with joy for the man she considered a brother.

“It’s great to finally meet you! You sure took your sweet time!” Naruto boomed happily, slapping his hand on the startled woman’s shoulder before leaning in and whispering, “Sorry you got stuck with that sad sack.”

“I heard that,” Sasuke huffed, his irritation unable to touch upon the happiness still in his expression, “Watch out for this one, Karin. He’s the biggest idiot I’ve ever met.”

“That’s not much coming from the biggest asshole I’ve ever met,” Naruto taunted mercilessly in return, earning little more than rolling eyes in return.

Soft laughter sounded from beside them, the tension in Karin’s form finally beginning to ebb at the antics of Sakura’s most cherished friends.

“It’s a lot different here than what I’m used to,” she started, her laughter fading but a smile remaining, “But... I like it. It’s nice to meet you both too.”

Based on the gentle smile on Sasuke’s face and Karin’s warm greeting, Sakura could tell that she was going to like her already.

“You’ve gotta tell me how you two finally met! I was starting to wonder if you’d find each other when you were old people,” Naruto enthusiastically demanded.

“I am very curious about what your soulmark says.” Sakura politely gestured to the couch and Karin nodded, both women making themselves comfortable. “We’ve known Sasuke’s since we were kids and, honestly, we’ve been thrilled to finally meet you.”

“Well, to answer your question, Sasuke broke into my house,” Karin chuckled, Naruto nearly tripping over his own two feet on his way to the couch in surprise.

“Sasuke! You *broke* into her *house* ?” Naruto parroted in shock, flopping onto his usual spot on the couch as he tsked at the Uchiha, “I thought you had, you know, *common decency* ?”

“I was pursuing a lead on Kisame Hoshigaki and found myself infiltrating an island base that a few leads had directed me to,” Sasuke interjected, settling himself onto the couch next to Naruto and roughly pushing his feet off of the cushions.

“That’s just a prettier way of saying *he broke into my house* ,” Karin stage whispered to Sakura.

Sakura hid a snort of amusement behind her hand. “Sounds about right.”

Sasuke cleared his throat. “It wasn’t my intention to act so rudely. I’ve never met anyone who called a secluded island fortress their home. Let alone one filled with empty jail cells and laboratories.”

Sakura’s interest peaked when she heard laboratories but, instead of commenting, she politely waited for Karin to continue.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, he’s an asshole, he broke into your house. What *next* ?” Naruto pressed impatiently, leaning forward in interest.

“I’m not much of a fighter but I’m a sensor so I noticed him arrive pretty quickly. I didn’t care much at first though since, usually, any intruders got caught in my traps. They’d either get turned away by a genjutsu, get washed away back into the ocean, or they’d get poisoned and I’d have a mess to clean up,” Karin explained, pushing up her glasses, “I never had anyone get through them so I admit I was a little freaked out. But... I was more excited than anything.”

“Excited? To have someone break into your home?” Sakura questioned, her eyebrows scrunching together.

Karin’s expression flushed as she rubbed the back of her head, embarrassed.

“Yes, well... I had been waiting for someone to for a long time,” she replied as she reached down and pulled down the top of one of her stockings, revealing handwriting that was undeniably Sasuke’s printed on her upper thigh.

Sakura and Naruto both leaned in close to read and, once they did, Naruto burst into a fit of laughter.

“You’re such a weirdo, of course that would be the first thing you’d say to her!” Naruto cackled before Sakura reached over to flick him in the forehead, “Ow! Sakuraa!”

Sakura’s scolding gaze softened when she faced Karin before commenting warmly, “I think it’s a romantic soulmark. He was

waiting for quite a long time to finally meet you. His soulmark finally makes sense now, that's for sure."

"Thank you. I always liked it... It meant I would know who he was the moment I met him," she replied, running her fingers across the soulmark scripted across her upper thigh.

I'm very sorry I broke into your home but I've been waiting my whole life to finally meet you

A fitting companion for Sasuke's soulmark, the mark that had endlessly amused Naruto and Sakura both as they were growing up: *Just because you're the most gorgeous man I've ever met doesn't mean I won't kick your ass*

"Sasuke said earlier that your home had laboratories in it? Are you a scientist?" Sakura asked curiously as Karin pulled up her stocking.

"I am," Karin answered with pride in her voice, "I specialize in creating potions and poisons and I've been working for years to create an emergency healing elixir from my blood."

"Your *blood* ?" Naruto mimicked, baffled.

"You'll surely hear much more about this, Sakura," Sasuke spoke, Sakura's interest only growing, "Itachi assigned Karin to work at one of the labs near the hospital to further her research and to earn her place in the village. It's likely you'll be working together in the future."

"I'm definitely looking forward to it and hearing more about this," she

answered honestly before looking back to Karin, "I hope you'll come to me if you need anything."

Karin nodded. "I appreciate that, thank you."

"Sooo do you have healing blood or something?" Naruto butted in.

"Well, uh... It's more my chakra? But I guess that's the short of it, yeah," Karin explained.

"Ah, okay. Me too. Well, sorta? With the chakra thing, I mean, not the blood part. Probably? Hmm..." he answered vaguely, only further confusing Karin, before his gaze drifted up to Karin's hair, his expression becoming pensive for a long moment.

"Nothing good happens when you think that hard," Sasuke quipped, "Don't burst a vessel."

"Hey, what's your last name? Who were your parents?" Naruto asked, ignoring him entirely.

"My last name? Well, it never really meant much to me even though I'm supposedly from some famous, dead clan from a long time ago. Like that means anything nowadays," she sighed before shaking her head and answering, "My mom was an Uzumaki and I have her last name. I don't know who my dad was."

All eyes in the room immediately locked onto Karin, the woman freezing under the sudden and intense gazes of three strangers.

“U-uh... Does that, er... *mean* ... something here?” Karin stammered out, uncomfortable.

The trio continued to gape at Karin before Naruto suddenly shot to his feet, all the eyes in the room snapping up to the blond.

“You’re...” Naruto started quietly, his eyes focused on Karin with such intensity that she leaned backwards in discomfort.

When the towering blond’s expression twisted, the man taking a deep inhale as his eyes began to water, Karin’s anxious expression transformed into one of confusion. Sakura felt her own eyes begin to water as she covered her mouth, unable to tear her eyes from the scene away from her.

Karin... was an Uzumaki?

“You’re my family,” Naruto forced out, tears readily slipping down his tanned cheeks as he lurched across to gather the woman up in his arms

“Whoa! H-hang on now! What are you talking about!?”

“I’m an Uzumaki too! I thought I was alone! I thought I was the last one!” he declared, easily lifting her up and spinning her around, “But you’re here!”

“There’s got to be tons of us all over! You can bet everyone you meet with red hair like mine has some Uzumaki blood!” she argued fiercely, pounding a fist into his back, “Put me down! Now!”

Immediately setting the woman down, Naruto pulled back but grasped her by the upper arms, tears still streaming down his face.

“You’re my sister now! Believe it!”

“We-we’re not siblings, you oaf!” she corrected loudly even though her expression was twisting, her eyes slowly becoming glossy - something she tried to hide by fixing her glasses, “We’re likely just some sort of cousin! Don’t get so sentimental, it’s ridiculous.”

“I don’t care! I thought I was alone and I bet you thought you were alone too! But we’re not!” Naruto declared happily, visibly trying to contain his excitement before giving in and wrapping the woman up in a tight embrace.

“We’re family...” he repeated, this time softer and with a quiet amazement as he sniffled against her shoulder.

“I guess if you’re so *desperate*,” Karin spat out, the venom in her words completely lost to the tears in her voice.

“Idiot...” she sobbed quietly, her hands shakily reaching up to return the blond’s embrace.

As Sakura looked on, she was unable to fight back her own tears which slipped down her cheeks unhindered and caught in the lines of her smile. Naruto had grown up without a family, he had never met his father and he only briefly met his mother’s chakra when Naruto released the seal holding back Kurama. He had no one but Hinata and eventually her and Sasuke when he was growing up, nearly all others scorning him for being the jinchuruki for the Nine Tailed Fox.

To witness him finally being united with someone who was family by blood left her speechless. She found herself overjoyed that Karin had finally met Sasuke. Not just because one of her most cherished people had finally found his soulmate but because Naruto had finally found a lost piece of his own lost clan.

Both of the men who Sakura considered brothers found a once in a lifetime happiness in the red haired stranger now openly sobbing in the arms of her best friend.

In the wake of such an emotional union, Sakura was at a loss for words. Nothing she could think of could even touch on the situation before her and, even if she could speak from behind her tears, she knew better than to interrupt this precious moment. Even Sasuke was silent as he slyly wiped moisture from the corner of his eyes. When their eyes met one another's from across the table, however, they both shared the same smile.

Chapter End Notes

While Jiraiya has written four Icha Icha books in the original Naruto series, Rock Lee's spinoff series refers to four other books written by Jiraiya. I included these mostly because the idea of Sakura having collected so many of Jiraiya's smutty books is hilarious to me.

Karin had, at one point, worked for Orochimaru as a sort of jailor for his human test subjects. After his death, Karin had freed all of the prisoners but, having nowhere to go herself, she remained and spent her days conducting experiments to replicate the healing properties of her blood.

Ino and Sai finally met while she was working with the ANBU on a case in the torture and interrogation department. I have a brief scene planned out for them but it's so short I wonder if I should bother writing it.

Love

Chapter Notes

We're finally at the last chapter! Please make note of the rating increase, the end of this chapter becomes very explicit.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Following the emotional introduction with Sasuke's soulmate where Naruto and Karin discovered they were family, the group had spent hours talking about their lives. While Sasuke told Karin stories of growing up in the village and the history behind their home, Naruto made sure to tone down the image of majesty with the reality of living in a village that embodied chaos. Sakura was the only one who tried to paint a humble picture of the city, attempting to find a middle ground between the two extremes.

When Sasuke told Karin the history behind the stone faces and the legacy the Hokage left behind, Naruto made sure to temper the illustrious impression with the fact he had frequently given the Third Hokage nosebleeds with his Sexy Jutsu - a story that Karin listened to with apt horror - before, of course, giving her his speech on how he was destined to be the Sixth Hokage. Sakura, trying to find a modest median, told Karin about how the village had begun as a treaty between the Senju and the Uchiha but how shinobi and civilians alike now lived together in harmony.

After a handful of stories from their childhood, Sakura - concerned her new friend was getting whiplash from the wild pacing of their tales - had asked her what her childhood had been like. The fact Karin had struggled to find a story to share with them, stating that she didn't want to bring down the mood, made Sakura's chest ache.

Instead, she asked about what it was like living on the island and if she had traveled anywhere interesting. This was met with a flurry of

stories of gentle adventures and tales of beautiful scenery, the Uzumaki's travels across the countries filled with colorful experiences that felt more like they belonged in a fairy tale. While she talked about towering stone fortresses, sprawling cave systems, stormy islands, and the curious life she would find thriving in these hidden worlds, Karin had a content smile on her face that put everyone's hearts at ease.

It was hours before Sakura finally noticed the sun had set and to remember that she had wanted to visit Shisui since he had just returned home earlier that day. Promising to drop by again the next day for lunch, Sakura said her goodbyes and welcomed Karin into the village and into her little family with a hug.

Excusing herself, she left Sasuke - and now Karin's - house, walking down a familiar path towards a familiar home closer to the heart of the Uchiha district. As she walked, she couldn't help the smile that spread across her lips. She couldn't be happier to have Karin become a part of the village, the unusual but kind woman making Sasuke and Naruto happy. She had always wondered who would be the one to say Sasuke's hilarious soul mark and finding out it was the sharp tongued and even sharper witted Uzumaki was something that brought her a great amount of joy.

Karin would fit right in.

With a smile still lingering on her face, she walked up the pathway to Shisui's home and knocked on the door. It was only a few moments later that the door swung open, revealing the also smiling face of her own soulmate.

“You look happy,” Shisui greeted, leaning down for a kiss.

Giving him a peck on the lips, she replied, “I’m going to ruin a surprise for you.”

“Color me very interested,” he laughed before gesturing inside, “Why not ruin it for me inside over some tea?”

“That sounds wonderful.”

“What are the chances? Not only did Sasuke finally find his soulmate but she’s an Uzumaki?” Shisui commented after Sakura told him of Karin before laughing, “I should give Itachi and Izumi some slack for keeping this gem away from me.”

“To be fair, I think she just got here yesterday afternoon. The Fifth might have wanted Sasuke to be the one to reveal the big news,” Sakura tried, smiling against the rim of her cup before taking a sip.

“Don’t worry, I’ll pretend to be surprised,” he promised with a wink before dramatically lamenting, leaning back against the couch they shared, “Although I can’t help but feel hurt that my baby cousin didn’t invite me over to meet his soulmate too.”

She laughed. "He probably didn't want you scaring her off."

He snorted in amusement, propping up his arm on the back of the couch and resting his chin in his hand.

"She'll have plenty of chances to get scared off as she meets the rest of the family." He paused, his eyebrows briefly furrowing in legitimate concern before he rapidly changed the subject before she could comment. "You were right though."

"About?" she asked, setting her glass back on the coffee table in front of them.

Shisui held up three fingers. "These things certainly do come in threes."

"I told you," Sakura agreed with a nod, "Even since Ino told me she found her soulmate, I was waiting to find out who would be third."

"They should be happy we set such a great example," he hummed as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close.

"I'm happy to take the lead," she purred with a hidden meaning as she nestled closer, tilting her head up to kiss him.

They shared one kiss then two. Then another and another, their kisses slowly lingering and growing more urgent until her heart was racing in her chest and her head felt like it was spinning. She basked in the feeling, searching out more in the arms and lips of his soulmate, her hand sliding up his chest and making him shiver.

Shisui hummed against her lips, the deep grumble sounding more like a groan and making her belly flutter, before slowly pressing her against the couch. Heat grew in her chest at the feeling of him above her, her hands growing bolder as he kissed her into the cushions.

Sakura heard him take a sharp breath as she skimmed her fingertips down his chest and stomach before circling around his back and pulling him closer. His sound of bliss sent pride and heat down her spine before he took her breath away by swiping his tongue across her lips.

She felt him smile when she gasped, something that lit a fire of challenge within her. Slowly wrapping her leg around his thigh, she made him shiver, before she nipped his bottom lip. While she succeeded in stealing his smug smile, his heated, returning kiss and his hand wrapping around the back of her neck to pull her closer dragged a breathy whimper from her. A quiet sound that encouraged him to deepen the kiss until their tongues finally met.

Even though Sakura's chest and her cheeks burned, the heat growing within her pushed her onwards, pulling him closer and encouraging him further. Her head was spinning as they kissed, his tongue against hers and his body heavy above her sending pleasure racing through her. When her nails dug into the strong line of his back, he breathed in sharply, his lips hovering above hers for a heartbeat before

beginning to draw a line across her cheek to her ear and down her neck.

Shisui's breath was hot against her skin as he pressed an open mouthed kiss to her throat, her own breath coming fast as his body moved against hers.

"I can feel your heart racing," he hummed against her skin, his voice rough as his lips lingered on her pulse point.

"I can't imagine why," she gasped in return.

He paused for a moment before snorting in amusement, the Uchiha hiding his face in her neck, something that made Sakura burst into giggles. They both began to laugh, their passion slowly fading as their amusement grew. While their affection for one another remained unchanged, they had both hit the limits of what they were ready for in that moment. Once their fit of laughter finally settled into the occasional giggle, Shisui raised his head, leaning up to press a quick peck to her lips before flopping back against the couch next to her.

Pulling her against his chest to cuddle instead, Sakura happily nestled up to him, her breathing still coming fast and her body still heated. Pressing her ear to his chest, she found the sound of his rapid heartbeat, the evidence of his own excitement making her laugh once more before she settled against him comfortably.

Despite them being soulmates, they were both still new at their

romance. She was glad they were on the same page since, even though the tension slowly uncoiling in her belly was far from unpleasant, she wasn't sure she was ready for much more. She was more than happy to instead cuddle as they normally did, listening to his heart gradually calm as he held her, his face nestled against her hair.

As Sakura listened to his heartbeat, however, her thoughts were drawn to something far more worrisome. Thoughts that she had been pushing to the side as she instead tried to just enjoy being with him. Thoughts of how many times his heart nearly stopped beating for good. Thoughts of the time it had been silenced and the soulmark in the crook of her thigh had been whisked away.

Anxiety welled within her as her thoughts escalated and she briefly wondered if he could hear her thoughts when his arms tightened around her. She could feel as tension slowly rose within him but she refused to bring up the questions that she had had since that day all those years ago.

"I'm happy you're here," she muttered against his chest instead, feeling as he stopped breathing for a moment.

"Me too..." Shisui whispered into her hair, sounding like that wasn't what he wanted to say.

Instead of replying, she nestled closer, wanting to enjoy the fact he was here now instead of worrying about the past. She didn't want to ruin the moment they had now by bringing up old fears.

A question for another time, Sakura decided, even as the weight of her worries grew heavier and heavier in her chest.

Shisui and Sakura said their goodbyes to Sasuke and Karin as the pair left Shisui's home following a visit. Sasuke was due to return to his mission hunting down the remaining Akatsuki members and had wanted to pick Shisui's brain on a handful of techniques regarding the sharingan. Karin and Sakura, on the other hand, needed no excuse to spend time together after developing an easy friendship.

While Shisui had expected there was something deeper to Sasuke's oddly specific questions than he let on as he grilled him over theoretical applications of the sharingan in regards to space time techniques, the elder Uchiha was too distracted to press him for any meaningful information.

Over the past few weeks, he had noticed how Sakura had slowly grown more and more tense, her mounting unhappiness making his own anxiety rise. It was obvious that something was on her mind, something that brought her a great amount of distress, but she continued to keep it to herself. Even during casual interactions like the friendly conversation she had with Karin over pastries - the two laughing and chatting about Karin's laboratory near the hospital - there was a hidden tension just beneath the surface of her expression.

He could see it in the lines of her smile and the crinkle of her eyes that her thoughts were elsewhere. If he was honest with himself, there was no question as to what was bringing her so much stress. Nonetheless, he had hoped that he could put off this conversation for longer. Forever would have been nice, although he knew it was

unreasonable to hope for such a thing from a woman such as Sakura.

Shisui thought back to their first date and how she had inadvertently brought up the time he had died. Not to mention how distraught she had been when he had nearly been killed just recently. He knew that it was those concerns that weighed her down now and, more than that, it had been questions about that night that had been haunting her for over a decade.

She deserved to know the truth. He knew that, he had known that. He also knew that he wasn't sure if he was ready to tell it; if he was ready to talk aloud about something he had kept secret for most of his life. He wasn't sure he'd ever be ready...

When Sasuke and Karin left, instead of sitting on the couch and nestling up with one of her many books spread across his living room table, Sakura had excused herself to go sit outside on the porch. He gave her some time to herself while he tidied up, convincing himself it was time to give her some privacy when in reality it was time he needed to further rehearse the conversation he had been planning for months.

Tonight would be the night he finally told her everything.

Folding a throw blanket and returning it to the back of the couch, he took a deep breath, steeling himself for the conversation to come, before stepping outside. He immediately spotted Sakura sitting at the end of the elevated walkway that bordered his home, his soulmate looking up at the starry night sky and the crescent moon. A crescent moon that always reminded him of *that* night, the night he had sacrificed everything to prevent a war.

A thousand different greetings flashed through his mind as he tried to figure out how to talk to her in that moment. “Beautiful night tonight”, “Sasuke and Karin seem to be doing well”, “Dinner was delicious”. No matter what he came up with, it all felt like hollow platitudes that couldn’t even touch upon the weight that sat on both of their hearts.

Instead, Shisui just walked forward and sat next to her silently, his gaze rising up to the sky to look up at the crescent moon with her.

“I think it’s time you heard everything,” he finally said, Sakura’s gaze finally breaking away from the sky to fall on him.

“What are you talking about?” she answered, wary.

Shisui met her eyes, attempting a weak smile that didn’t fool either of them. “The answers to the questions that have been bothering you ever since your soulmark disappeared for a night fourteen years ago.”

Sakura’s eyes widened, her lips parting as if to speak although no words came. Instead, she closed her mouth with a concerned expression, waiting for him to continue instead.

“I’m not sure where to start but...” Shisui took a deep breath, still not sure if he was ready himself to talk about what happened then. “When

I was sixteen, a war was about to start. Not one between nations... but one between my clan and the village. My family was planning a coup.”

Sakura gasped softly, bringing a hand to her mouth to conceal her shocked expression.

“I can understand why to be honest. You can’t see it now, with Itachi being the Hokage, but my clan was once the outcasts of the village. I was told that, ever since the rule of the Second Hokage - ever since the founding of the village if you consider the desertion of Madara Uchiha - we have been unwelcome.”

“For as long as I could remember growing up, we were untrusted. People considered us unstable and dangerous, like one wrong step would make us snap like rabid animals,” he explained, unable to keep the very real hurt he still remembered from that time from slipping into his voice, “We were never allowed any real political power and we were only given useless positions of no real substance. Even the police station was a farce where all of our decisions would be overturned.”

“I understood why they wanted it to stop. But I also knew that a coup would kill hundreds - maybe even thousands - of innocent people. It could spark another world war and I wasn’t sure if *anyone* would survive. So I did everything I could to stop it...” Shisui continued before finally turning to face Sakura again, worried by what he’d find in her expression.

When he found nothing but her attention, her understanding, and her worry, he continued, “Do you remember the battle between the Third

Hokage and Danzo Shimura?"

"Of course. It rained ash for weeks. We nearly had to evacuate the village since they were struggling to put the fires out for so long," Sakura answered, her eyebrows furrowed as she remembered the fallout.

"Danzo, the man who tried to assassinate the Third Hokage... Before his attack, he tried to kill me too."

"He..." Sakura started, "Why would he do such a thing?"

"Because I was going to stop the coup," Shisui answered simply.

"I don't understand..."

"My most powerful jutsu is a genjutsu that I can use with my Mangekyo Sharingan - the ultimate form of my clan's bloodline trait. It's a technique that, well, to put it simply, it's... mind control," Shisui cleared his throat, knowing that the fact he was not only capable of something so morally ambiguous but that he had used this technique was something that made people uncomfortable, "I was going to use it on the person who was leading the coup to put an end to the revolt. I was going to use it on Sasuke and Itachi's father."

"Fugaku?" Sakura parroted in shock, "*Fugaku* was leading the coup?"

“He was. He was willing to do anything to bring my family out of the shadows, to take the respect of the village even if it was through fear. And I was willing to do anything to stop him. Little did I know Danzo would do anything to stop me.”

“Why? What did Danzo have to gain from the village going to war with itself?” she asked.

“The destruction of my clan and the corpses of my family members. He would sacrifice anything and anyone to rule the village. And he had discovered how to steal our sharingan and use it for himself. He very much wanted my eyes...” Shisui brought a hand to his eye, shuddering at the memory of the sensation of Danzo ripping it from its socket. “When he attacked me after I had gotten approval from the Third to use my jutsu on Fugaku, he succeeded in stealing one.”

“After he ambushed me, I realized that he wouldn’t stop until I was dead and that I could no longer go through with my plan. So, I found Itachi. I gave him my remaining eye and... And I...” Shisui felt his throat tightening as he struggled to get the words out, to finally say out loud what he had done in his desperation to save the people he loved, “I killed myself.”

Sakura’s quiet gasp felt like a knife sliding between his ribs. He felt her warm hand settle on his knee, trying to comfort him. When he looked to her and saw the unshed tears in her eyes, he had to turn away, unable to meet her gaze with the lump growing in his throat.

Shisui tried to force out a laugh as he rubbed the back of his head, trying to play off his humiliation as simple embarrassment. He tried to fall back on humor as he normally did in situations like these but all the jokes he tried to muster tasted like ash on the back of his tongue. It felt wrong, his fake smile falling as he refused to meet her eyes.

“I threw myself from a cliff and landed in the river below,” he explained instead, unable to hide behind his humor and instead choosing to tell his soulmate the truth she deserved to know, “But even though I told Itachi to let me die, he didn’t. He jumped in after me and took me to the hospital. The medical ninja there saved my life. He went to the Third and told him everything that had happened and the Third confronted Danzo.”

“The Third took back my eye from Danzo and gave it back to me. Itachi gave me back my other eye too. It was because of this show of faith, because the Third got revenge for me and gave me back my eye despite its power, that negotiations were finally able to take place. They came to the agreement that Itachi would be groomed to be the Fifth Hokage, the first Uchiha Hokage in history. Itachi was actually supposed to take over when he turned twenty but, well... you remember what happened.”

Shisui had expected Sakura to bombard him with questions, accusations, even insults, but instead he was met with silence. He almost felt it was worse.

“I know this is a lot to take in all at once but I wanted you to know. You deserved to know...” he continued, feeling like he was babbling, before he whispered, “The only regret I had when I was falling was that I was going to hurt you.”

He was surprised by the set of arms that wrapped around him tightly, drawing him into a warm embrace. He felt his heart drop into his stomach at Sakura's sniffles as she held him and it wasn't until he felt how she was shaking that he realized how hard she was crying.

"Oh, please don't cry!" Shisui tried to apologize as he looped his arms around her, pulling her close in an attempt at an apology, "I just, I wanted to, I-"

He immediately regretted going into so much detail, telling her about how he had committed suicide. He had wanted to tell her the truth like she deserved, not make her cry. Before he could continue with his rambling apology, she cut him off.

"I'm so, so, so..." Sakura growled before pulling away, her watery eyes glaring down at him, "*Angry* with you!"

Before he could even come up with a reply, shocked by her response, she continued, "I can't believe you'd think that killing yourself was the answer! That you thought that would ever be a course of action for you! That that would even be a thought for you! Do you have any idea how many people you abandoned, how many hearts you broke? How do you think Itachi felt? What about Sasuke? What about *me*?"

"Sakura, I-" Shisui tried, unsure of what to even say.

"I can't believe you would throw your life away like that!" she interrupted viciously before her expression slowly softened, "But I..."

I'm proud of you."

"I don't understand," he muttered, not sure if he had heard her right.

"You were doing anything you could to stop a war. You were willing to do anything, even sacrifice your life, to protect the people you love. You were so young, just sixteen... I can't imagine how hard that must have been, how much that must have hurt..." Sakura explained, a slow smile building as she gazed at him, "And you did it. You prevented a revolt, you *stopped a war*. And now your family is a treasured part of the village. We'd be nothing without all of you."

"I'm proud of you," she repeated, now smiling openly - even through her tears - as she held his gaze.

"Thank you..." Shisui weakly whispered in return, realizing no one had ever told them they were proud of him for what he had done.

His suicide and everything he had done to save the village had been brushed under the rug and hidden away. He hadn't even spoken about it since the day he woke up in the hospital and Itachi told him everything. He knew that it was necessary, that any information about the would be coup escaping could mean an end to the fragile peace. He hadn't done what he did for fame or appreciation, he had done it because he wanted to save the village.

To have someone tell them they were proud of him for everything he did though, for everything he was ready to sacrifice, and to tell him

that he had made a difference... it felt like a weight lifted off of his shoulders. He could feel heat rapidly building behind his eyes as he gazed into the watery eyes of his soulmate.

“It was because of that night that I became a medical ninja, you know,” Sakura confessed, wiping her damp cheeks, “When I thought I lost you, I was devastated. I had never even met you and I was just a kid but you were my soulmate... I thought I lost you forever and, when my soulmark came back that morning, my mom told me it must have been because your life was saved by a medical ninja.”

She smiled as she continued. “I knew then what I wanted to do with my life. That I never wanted anyone to hurt like I had been. That I wanted to be the reason that someone could feel the same relief I did when they saw their soulmark come back.”

Amazement that he had affected her life so much before they had even met surged through him alongside a breathtaking wave of shame. He was touched by how she had decided to become a healer to save lives after he had nearly died but he felt ashamed for having put her through so much. A single tear finally escaped his control as he reaches out to grasp her hands in his.

“I’m so sorry I did that to you. I always hoped you wouldn’t remember or that you would forget or that it wouldn’t hurt so much. I had hoped that I wasn’t abandoning you, that you would be okay,” he apologized, unable to control the tears that continued to fall as he dropped his head in shame.

Sakura gently pulled her hands away to instead wrap her arms around his shoulders, pulling his head against her chest. He looped his arms

around her waist, falling into her warm embrace.

“You’re an *idiot* for doing something so reckless. For breaking the hearts of so many people, for sacrificing yourself... but thank you,” she whispered against his hair, holding him close, “Thank you for doing whatever you could for our home. And thank you for showing me my purpose in life. Without you, I don’t know where I’d be.”

Shisui tried to speak, desperate to say anything to thank her for her kindness, her affection, her understanding, but a fresh wave of hot tears cuts him off. He held her tighter instead, taking a deep, shaky breath as he gathered the strength he could in that moment to string together five wobbly words.

“I’m sorry for hurting you.”

She pulled away from him, her warm hands cupping his face as she smiled. He never felt more vulnerable than in that moment, his soulmate seeing his tears as he broke down after confessing the secret he had held for nearly fifteen years.

“Just never do it again,” Sakura said firmly, wiping his tears away with her thumbs, “Or I’ll bring you back just to kill you myself!”

He laughed, the emotional tension around them falling away with her joke.

“I promise,” Shisui finally answered, gazing up at her with a warmth flooding his heart unlike anything he had ever felt.

“I’m holding you to it,” she laughed, leaning forward to press a lingering kiss to his lips before he pulled her into his arms, hiding his smile as well as tears that continued to fall.

For the weeks following his confession, Sakura and Shisui were inseparable. Every moment not spent on a mission, at the hospital, or with friends was spent in each other’s company and in each other’s arms.

More often than not, with the passion between them growing more and more powerful every day, the time they spent together was frequently marked with bouts of kissing and wandering hands.

Today was no different, the soulmates having laid down in bed together in the early afternoon to take a nap but having gotten distracted by gentle kisses that slowly turned into something far more heated.

Shisui had Sakura pressed against his bed, his weight settled between her thighs as he kissed her for all he is worth. His tongue explored her mouth as her soft hands snuck under his shirt to explore the lines of his back, her fingertips tracing scars she was now more than familiar

with.

With his messy hair even further mussed and his eyes half lidded from satisfaction, he pulled away from her embrace to look down at his flushed soulmate. He felt a wave of affection for her as he gazed at her, his soulmate bathed in the dim, warm light drifting in through the blinds of his bedroom window.

“You know, after all this time...” he started to tease, shivering as she dragged her fingernails down his belly, “I still haven't seen your soulmark.”

A catlike smile spread across her lips as Sakura purred, “I guess you’ll have to find it then.”

His own smile widening in excitement, he asked, “Are you ready for that?”

“Yes,” she answered easily, her smile losing its teasing edge as she looked up at him with warmth in her eyes.

Shisui leaned down to press a lingering kiss to her lips before he dipped down, trailing soft kisses down her neck. Sitting up, he gently dragged his fingers down her arm, appreciating the powerful muscles she had built through years of training, until he grasped her hand. Splaying open her fingers, he curiously checked for his familiar handwriting along the sides of her fingers, pressing a kiss to each fingertip when he finished his investigation.

When he took her left hand, repeating the same process, Sakura asked, "Don't you think you would have noticed it if it were there?"

He nipped the tip of her ring finger, drawing a laugh from her as he smiled. "It never hurts to check again."

Smoothing his hands down her arm, his fingers settled on the zipper of her shirt, looking up to her and getting a smile of silent permission. He pulled down the zipper, revealing a bra of simple design and an expanse of smooth, creamy skin. His eyes flicked across the revealed skin, lingering on the scars scattered across her form.

Shisui reached out, brushing his thumb across a particularly painful looking scar on her belly, a frown pulling the edges of his lips.

"It's from my battle with Sasori of the Red Sand. He ran me through near the end of the fight. It was a poisoned blade and difficult to heal at the end of that fight," Sakura explained softly, his frown only deepening, before she reached up to cradle his face in her hands.

"I'm still here," she comforted, her thumbs smoothing out the lines of his frown as she smiled up at him, bringing him back to the moment with her, "And I won too."

He smiled in return, cupping her hand and nuzzling her palm before

kissing her wrist. "You certainly did."

Pulling away, he dipped down, pressing a kiss to the jagged scar and drawing a soft gasp from his soulmate. A wave of heat washed over him at the sound, Shisui deciding he loved the sound of her gasp and wanted to hear more. Pressing more kisses to her belly, his hands skimmed up her sides, tracing the curve of her waist as he opened her shirt further.

Looking up at her, he felt a rush of satisfaction at the sight of his soulmate's half lidded expression.

"Your eyes," she breathed, Shisui feeling a wave of embarrassment as he realized that he had activated his sharingan in his excitement.

"Does it bother you?" he asked, his anxiety building as he stilled completely, waiting for her answer.

Sakura smiled, meeting his gaze, as she answered, "I think it's romantic."

He nearly sagged in relief, pressing one final kiss to her soft belly before saying, "Roll over, darling."

She gave him an impish smile before rolling over, allowing him to slip her shirt off of her shoulders. His eyes greedily took in every inch of

revealed skin although he found no familiar handwriting. Dropping her shirt off the edge of the bed, his gaze snapped to the scar on her back which matched the one on her belly. Bowing down, he pressed a kiss to the mark, drawing a sigh from his soulmate.

Reaching up, Shisui ran his fingers through her hair, lifting up her candy colored locks to check the nape of her neck. Sakura giggled in response, her laughter turning into a sigh as he kissed the back of her neck. He lingered for a moment, nuzzling her hairline, before brushing his lips against her skin and shivering at the sound she made.

His trailed kisses down the arch of her spine as he held himself above her, only stopping when he found the cloth of her bra. Heart racing, he unclasped the clip, before continuing his path downwards, his hands smoothing along her hips and down her thighs.

Pulling back to look at her legs, he found nothing, before continuing to the bottoms of her feet. Sakura muffled her laughter in the pillow as he tickled her by checking her toes. Finding nothing on either foot, his hands slid back up her thighs and up her hips, his fingertips dipping into the waistband of her shorts.

“Is this okay?” he asked, his voice deep with his growing arousal.

“Please keep going,” she hummed, heat building in his chest and in his belly.

Grasping the waistband of Sakura’s shorts, he gently pulled them

down. His breath stopped in his chest as he slowly revealed a pair of panties doing little to conceal her rounded rear. She lifted her hips to allow him to pull her shorts down and off of her feet, Shisui unable to look away from the beauty beneath him as he dropped the cloth to the floor next to the bed without another thought.

Hesitantly, Shisui reached out, running his hands up the back of her strong thighs to cup her rear, his pants becoming uncomfortably tight. He slowly pulled down the edge of her panties, peeking beneath the thin strip of cloth to look for his handwriting. Finding nothing, he smoothed the fabric back down and grasped her muscled rear once more, his soulmate wiggling her hips in return and making his pounding heart skip a beat.

“Roll back over,” he rumbled and she happily did so, looking up at him with half lidded eyes.

Holding himself above her, he dipped down to press a lingering kiss to her lips. One kiss turned into many as he became distracted, Shisui running his tongue across her lips and slowly sinking into her warm embrace.

His focus was only broken when Sakura whispered against his mouth, “Keep going.”

He smiled against her lips before pulling back again, this time grasping the straps of her bra hanging onto her shoulder and delicately tugging the strips of cloth down and off her arms. Sakura brushed her knee up his thigh and hip in silent encouragement, urging him onwards as he pulled off her bra and revealed her breasts. He swallowed once, having to actively focus on finding his soulmark

instead of getting lost in the passion building between them.

Dropping down, he pressed a kiss to the center of her chest, one hand gliding up her side before settling on her breast. Drawing a line of kisses to the other, he captured a nipple between his lips, drawing a gasp from his soulmate. Dragging his tongue across the nub, he rolled the other between his fingertips, Sakura's soft moan sending a bolt of heat to his straining length.

Tracing a new line of kisses to her other breast, he repeated the process, revelling in her gasps and how her legs tightened around his hips.

It took more effort than he could have imagined to pull himself away to continue downward, dragging his lips across the sensitive skin of her belly before stopping at her underwear. He paused, looking up at his lover from between her thighs, her flushed cheeks and parted lips making his member ache. He hooked his fingers around her panties, her heated veridian gaze meeting his sharingan bright eyes.

"Shisui," was all she whispered, his name being not only all the permission he needed but a heated request.

His head swam as he pulled off her panties, Sakura lifting her hips to make it easier to slip the strip of cloth down her thighs and off her feet. He settled between her legs, his cheeks burning as he gazed down at her. Soft, pink lips framed a tender core already dewy with her own arousal, the intoxicating scent of her desire making his length throb.

His hands settled on her thighs to spread her legs wider and it was only then that he finally caught sight of it. Written in his familiar handwriting was her soulmark, hidden in the crook of her thigh.

“I didn’t know angels had pink hair,” he read aloud before huffing out a laugh that sounded more like a moan.

“No wonder you wouldn’t show it to me...” Shisui mused, his voice deep with desire, before he pressed a kiss to the soulmark that bound them together.

Sakura gasped, her teasing reply dying on her lips as her legs twitched in surprise, before he pulled back to press a kiss to her core. She moaned, her thighs tightening around his shoulders and encouraging him to continue. The scent of her made his heart race and his cock throb, his own need making it difficult to resist the urge to grind himself into the sheets beneath him.

He kissed her swollen lips again and again before dragging his tongue across her sensitive pearl, deeply satisfied when a cry spilled from her lips. He reached up to run his fingers down her tender slit, her folds slick with arousal. Encouraged by her squirming hips, he slipped a finger inside of her as he licked again, basking in the sounds of pleasure that slipped free from his soulmate.

He slowly pumped his finger in and out of Sakura’s hot passage as he circled his tongue around her clit. When he added another finger, her hand tangled in his messy hair, Shisui moaning against her. By the time he added a final finger, she was soaking wet and rocking her hips against his lips, his soulmate so slick and ready that she made not a single sound of discomfort.

“Shisui!” she gasped, her fingers tightening in his curls, “I want-”

Finally pulling back, he looked up at Sakura, his sharingan allowing him to memorize her flushed expression and the desire in her eyes. Needily tugging on the shoulder of his shirt, he readily obeyed, following her pull to press a hungry kiss to her lips. She returned his passion, her hands sliding down his back to tug at the hem of his shirt.

Pulling his shirt upwards, he only parted from her for the moment it took for her to tug it over his head. As their lips met once again, her hands snuck between them to undo the button on his pants, parting the cloth and giving his straining length a semblance of relief.

Unwilling to part, he reached down to push his pants off, easily slipping them off of his legs and off the edge of the bed. Slipping his hand between them to grip his length, he took a breath to ask if she was ready one final time, but she interrupted him by hooking her leg around him hips and pulling him closer in silent assent.

Groaning quietly, Shisui kissed her deeply as he pressed the head of his weeping member into her center. Her swollen lips parted around his thickness, his soulmate arching against him in encouragement as he slowly pushed into her welcoming channel. He filled her with gradually deepening thrusts, gathering her slickness as he sunk farther and father inside of her, until he finally seated himself deep within her heat.

He didn't realize he was holding his breath until Sakura rolled her

hips and made him gasp against her mouth as she drew him deeper inside of her, the head of his member pressing flush against her innermost barrier. Their lips moved against one another as she adjusted to his girth buried within her and he adjusted to the blissful sensation of her soft, tight walls around him. Slowly, he pulled out before effortlessly sinking back inside of her soaking passage, Sakura groaning as he filled her inch by inch.

Dropping his forehead to her shoulder, he pressed open mouth kisses to the line of her throat, moaning against her skin as her slick walls tightened around him. She gasped in pleasure when he snapped his hips against hers, Shisui making sure to repeat the motion with his next thrust. He sighed in satisfaction when her fingers threaded into his hair, pulling him closer to her as she rocked back into his thrusts, helping him find the motion he needed to please her.

Shisui's free hand slid across the sheets, finding her hand so they could lace their fingers together as he filled her. Even with the pleasure that came from seating himself over and over within her soaking walls, he maintained a steady pace, so caught up in the passion of their first time together.

Each of his slow but powerful thrusts drew a sound of bliss from his lover's lips, her fingers tightening in his hair as she arched against him. He could hear her whispering something that sounded almost like his name between each gasp but he could hardly make sense of it with his own pleasure mounting.

When Sakura came, it was with a broken cry, her thighs tightening around his waist as her passage spasmed around his cock. He muffled his own moan against her neck, the rhythmic clenching of her walls and her euphoric cries bringing him to his own end. Shisui buried himself inside of her a handful more times, dragging out her orgasm as far as he could, before hilding himself deep within her as he

finished, pouring himself against her innermost barrier.

Panting, the soulmates lied together for a dozen heartbeats, basking in the lingering pleasure. When his euphoria faded enough to think, he lifted himself onto his elbow, kissing her deeply. Drunk with passion, their kisses were unhurried and meticulous, their fingers still laced together. Pressing his lips to hers one last time, he pulled back and slipped out of her, Sakura gasping as she was left empty of his thickness but not his seed.

Dipping down, he scooped up her underwear from the floor as well as a rag from his nightstand. Offering her the cloth, he helped slip her panties back onto the hips of his boneless soulmate to catch the product of their passion before it stained his crumpled comforter. Lying back down at Sakura's side, she nestled against his chest with a contented sigh, his arms looping around her as he buried his face in her hair.

"That was..." Shisui started, unable to come up with the words he needed to explain how incredible that had been with the haze of euphoria still fogging his thoughts.

"Amazing," she finished for him with a soft laugh.

Pulling back just enough to gently tilt up her head, he pressed a lingering kiss to her lips. A kiss that was followed by another and another until he pulled away to press his forehead to hers. Gazing into her eyes, he couldn't help the smile that spread across his lips or the utter joy in that moment that fueled it.

“I love you,” Shisui confessed, unable to come up with a better time or place to tell her what had been in his heart for months than in the bliss following them giving themselves to each other.

Sakura’s returning smile was soft and sweet as she threaded her fingers into his messy hair, pulling him down into a tender kiss. When she spoke, the adoration in her voice and in her verdian eyes made his heart swell.

“I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

This originally started off as being a simple three-shot but it turned into something a lot more complex as I started writing it. It definitely took a lot longer than expected to finish it but I am very happy with the result. Thank you everyone who has stuck around and showed so much love for this story!

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